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I really wasn't into games before. I had read Dune and when I heard that there was a game on it, I just had to check it out for myself if only to see how faithfully it recreated the Frank Herbert storyline.

To say I was pleased that it did is an understatement. Actually, you don't have to know anything about the novel to play and enjoy the game, as was the case with several opponents. The game stands on its own merits.

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STANLEY SCHMIDT

QUALITY CONTROL

Occasionally, when these columns deal with some aspect of our own culture, someone objects that this is not really suitable for a science fiction magazine. I disagree. It is very much the business of science fiction to consider ways that societies themselves—not just their hard technologies—can work. The present name of this magazine was intended to suggest that science fiction can be, among other things, an "analog simulation" of a future or alien society—which might tell us something valuable about what to cultivate (or avoid) in the real future. It is in that spirit that I sometimes examine some feature of here and now. Here and now is a specimen, an example which we can examine in more detail than most other examples, and consider how varying certain parameters might change things.

Consider quality control.

It's an old, familiar concept in industry. (Consumers have been known to wonder whether it's an old, *forgotten* concept there, but more of that later.) Products coming off an assembly line are examined for certain possible defects and either rejected or stamped "Inspected by #29" and passed on to the shipping department and thence to the consumer. At a different level, an employee's performance is reviewed periodically to see whether he should be retained, promoted, transferred, or fired.

But these examples are much smaller than what I'm getting at. My question of the day is: how do you quality-control quality control itself? Not just in terms of, "How reliably is Inspector #29 culling out the clunkers?", but in terms of controlling the overall quality of goods, services, and life itself throughout the society.

In other words, how does a society control its own quality?

The first obstacle you run into, of course, is that no two people can quite agree on what they mean by quality of life. Tastes and values differ, and the differences do not necessarily imply differences of "worth." I have good friends who would find a steady diet of my lifestyle quite as insufferable as I would find theirs. I think we would agree that any high-quality society we must share must make some allowance for our differences, so that we can both follow our preferences, as far as possible, without interfering with each other.

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That's a large subject in itself, which I don't propose to plunge into right now. But there are some simpler measures by which a *lot* of us can agree that all is not well with our present society's quality control.

Compared to what? Compared to some parts of the past, *possibly* —but that's hard to debate meaningfully. "Good old days" syndrome (alias "selective memory") is too widespread and too incompatible with objectivity. Compared to what *could* be, though, we can probably agree that all is not fine and dandy with our overseeing mechanism.

Some examples:

Postal service in the United States now costs much more than formerly (even after correction for inflation) and suffers frequent additional increases. Yet a great many users are convinced that the higher price buys slower and less reliable service. Until a very few years ago, I had never had anything lost in the mail, to my knowledge, but in the last four or five years I've watched numerous items disappear. Some have arrived, but only after ridiculous lengths of time (such as three weeks from Cincinnati to Cleveland). I could tell you the story of our efforts to get Art Dula's article here in time for last July's issue, but it's too long and you wouldn't believe it anyway—it's too fantastic even for a science fiction magazine. Suffice it to say that it includes the loss in transit of not one, but *two* copies of the manuscript—the second sent "special delivery."

Daunted by such experiences, I recently tried to have an important package delivered by one of the commercial alternatives to the postal service—and wound up writing a thousand-word letter of complaint to the president of the company. Three attempts to deliver the package were bungled, so I finally had to drive sixteen miles to pick it up myself. When I arrived, the first employee who looked for it couldn't find it and nobody showed any interest in looking further until I demanded the president's name and address and refused to budge until something was done.

I bought a used car which needed some work before I drove it off the lot and a good deal more shortly thereafter—work which should have been done before the car was put up for sale, if the dealer was as conscientious as he claimed (before the sale). *After* the sale, he seemed to consider it a personal affront whenever I returned to have something put right under the guarantee. Much of the work had to be done two or three times to get it good enough to withstand even casual inspection. Within the year, most of it proved to have been done in the shabbiest, most perfunctory way the shop could get away with.

I now depend on one of the rail lines serving New York, and during the year I have so far been dependent, the service has undergone a steady—no,

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jerky—decline. During the summer, a car with functional air-conditioning was a precious rarity, windows could not be opened, and repairs were—well, let's just say, "not prompt." During the last month, among the trains I've ridden, on-time arrival has been almost as rare—but passengers unable to find seats have become increasingly common. Many conductors (not all) react snappishly to any inquiry about what's going on and show no interest in trying to find out or effect any improvement.

I could easily name numerous restaurants and commercially packaged foods which have conspicuously increased their prices while quietly decreasing quantity and/or quality.

You, I suspect, would have no trouble extending this list from your own experience.

I'm not a chronic complainer, predisposed to grumble about whatever goods or services I'm offered. I have, in fact, an almost pathologically slow fuse, and it takes a good sustained application of irritant to get me riled up. I could cite equally striking examples of admirable service and quality merchandise—but I encounter them so seldom they stand out like shining beacons. The general trend I think I see is a tendency to offer less and charge more—and *not to care.*

Part of it, admittedly, is this mysterious thing called inflation, which everybody would like to control and nobody seems to know how. (Although we seem awfully casual about doing things which can hardly help having the opposite effect—such as raising prices by "round numbers" like quarters or dollars rather than by smaller amounts determined by actual cost increases.)

But part of it, I think, is something more fundamental—a matter of attitude which has insinuated itself into our national character. To what extent it is recent and to what extent it has always been there I'm not sure (though it's quite clear that *some* goods and services really have deteriorated). But I feel rather confident, in any case, that we would be better off with less of it. A society whose members feel no obligation to do well what they are paid to do—and no serious expectation that others do so—is not likely to offer the quality of life that it could.

If this diagnosis has any validity, what can be done about it? And by whom? On that assembly line, we can point to Inspector #29 as the Person Responsible for seeing that shoddy work does not go out. But who is responsible for quality control of a civilization?

The "obvious" answer, too often accepted uncritically, is government. Legislation and regulatory agencies, it is supposed, can see to it that the subsystems of society function in acceptable ways; this is the philosophy behind the FDA and OSHA. Quite possibly some of this approach is a necessary part of any workable attempt at solving the problem, but there are dangers in regarding it as sufficient. It depends crucially on the

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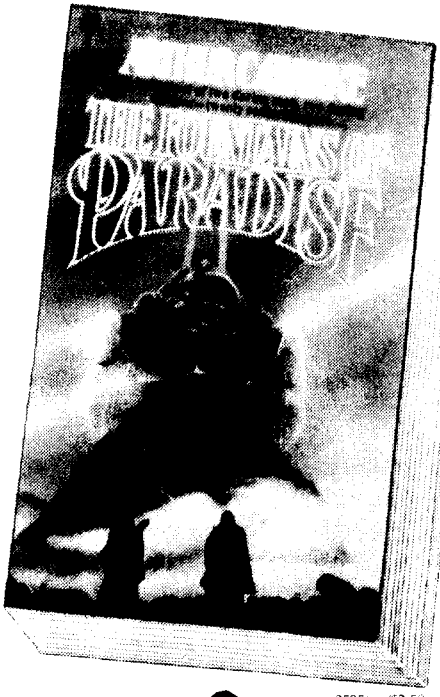

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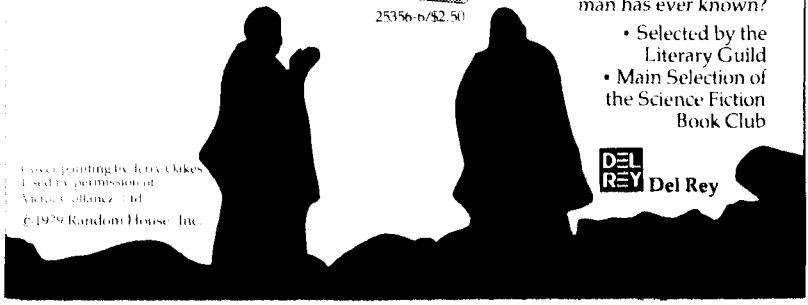

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assumption that such agencies can be trusted to make reasonable and useful regulations, which implies not only competence but enough interest in the task at hand—and few enough conflicting interests—to apply that competence wisely. It depends also on whether other agencies implement and enforce the regulations effectively. (I know New York has anti-litter laws, but I also know they're widely ignored.)

Perhaps most importantly, the philosophy that "the government can do it" evades the question, "Who quality-controls the government?"

That, of course, is intimately related to the whole question of quality control in a society. In a very real sense, people do tend to get the government they deserve. If they assume that government can be trusted to take care of everything, and leave it to do so on its own, they can hardly be surprised at unpleasant results. If they don't like the way things are done, and make no attempt to get them changed, they must share the blame.

But if individuals must bear responsibility for quality control, both of the government and of the things government is supposed to help watch, they face huge practical questions as to precisely what they can do. One citizen complaining to another doesn't count; if that's as far as it goes, it has no effect at all. When a system becomes as large as many governments and corporations have become, the sheer bureaucratic mass to be moved is such that the individual is hard put to apply any force that will produce a detectable acceleration—and when the system is also very complex (as political and economic systems are), he may not be sure what *kind* of force is really needed. But it's not always as impossible to do something as people tend to assume, and the possible effects can multiply dramatically if *multitudes* of individuals try to do something.

At the level of individual versus corporation, the mere act of complaining, articulately and insistently, often does far more than might be supposed. I mentioned earlier my experience with a delivery service (with which, by the way, most of my previous dealings had been quite satisfactory). My refusal to leave the office until my package was found irritated and apparently surprised the clerk, but it did inspire him to find it. My follow-up letter to the president created something of a stir among the regional directors and led to a prompt and profusely apologetic long-distance call in which one of them offered to make real and significant amends. As he remarked, a customer as irked as I was is likely to become a lost customer, and for every one who wrote, there were ten or twenty who didn't bother.

Precisely because businesses *are* in business to make money, they can't afford too many lost customers—so they are likely to listen quite carefully to any who are on the brink. They *want* to know when they're driving customers away, so they can change the conditions responsible—but *they*

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have to be told.

There are, of course, some businesses which try to get rich quick by ripoffs, or simply don't understand the dangers of taking unscrupulous advantage of customers. I've dealt with these, too. Polite letters (growing progressively less polite) did absolutely nothing—until I announced that if I didn't have a check in hand by a specified date I would turn over all the correspondence to the local Better Business Bureau and the Federal Trade Commission. I've seldom seen a company act so fast.

With a form letter, yet—which means that this company was prepared to deal routinely with customers who knew how to threaten effectively, while continuing to rip off those who didn't or wouldn't. Organizations such as the BBB are there and can greatly amplify individual clout—but *only if you use them.*

Every individual who puts up with shoddy merchandise or service, or unreasonable pricing, without complaining loudly to somebody who counts, is in effect saying, "It's all right." And thereby encouraging and tempting even fairly conscientious organizations to try to get away with just a little more. If too many have done so, it's at least partly because too many individuals have given them just such encouragement.

Sometimes an individual can't make a dent, no matter how hard he tries. *I* can't slow down inflation by refusing to buy steak or orange juice when its price is high and stocking up when and where the price is low. But if even half the population did that, routinely, with every item it could... producers and distributors would *have* to look seriously into ways to cut costs and hence prices. In cases where residents of an area have had reason to suspect medical danger from misuse of agricultural or industrial chemicals, or inadequate security or safety measures at a power plant, no one of them could do very much. But groups of them, with time and stubbornness, have sometimes been able to.

Such mass actions tend to require organized effort which is hard to sustain for long. Sometimes they are not only hard to sell, but impractical to carry out. In the case of the railroad I mentioned earlier, I suspect the management would show a good deal more interest in getting things under control if eighty percent of its regular commuters announced that they would quit riding until things were fixed—and then did it. But that's not likely to happen, because most of those people can't stay away from their own jobs to put pressure on the railroad, and many have no other way to get there.

Ultimately, whatever formal mechanisms may exist, the final responsibility for quality of life in a civilization rests on the individuals who live in it. If too few of them want quality enough to insist on it and work for it, they won't get it. If most of them do want it that much—their chances are better, anyway. There are still limits to what they can do, but we can be *sure* how much they'll ac-

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complish if they don't try. A good place to start would be for every person to cultivate the habit of demanding that the goods, services, and government he buys meet high standards—and refusing to accept less without the most effective protest he can make.

There's a corollary, of course. If everybody demands the best from everybody else and nobody puts a comparable effort into seeing that what he provides to others meets those same standards—there'll be a lot more complaining and a lot more frustration and not much else. What's needed, it seems, is a generally prevalent feeling of "mutual responsibility"—the firm and deep-seated belief that, for our mutual happiness and well-being, I must do to the best of my ability what I do for you, *and* you must do the same for me.

Sound familiar?

Now...how do you persuade a whole populace to adopt and maintain an attitude that should benefit them all? For what I'm talking about is, above all, a matter of attitude—and it's also an example of a feedback system. If enough individuals have the "mutual responsibility" attitude, it will tend to be self-restoring and regenerating through the rewards of satisfaction with value received and given. That has happened in some times and places. But it works the other way, too. If too few feel mutual responsibility, and most individuals instead feel that they are being preyed upon constantly and from all quarters, it's quite understandable, if not commendable, if they feel they must treat others the same way to survive.

How do you break out of the loop?

Legislation can be a small part of it; formal education can be a small part; religion can play a part which has ranged from central and dominant to negligible or absent. But, however it's maintained, the attitude toward these matters is something that runs very deep in the fabric of a culture. Recently, hiking in the Swiss Alps, I was struck by the fact that high places there were inhabited and visited by far more people than comparable areas in many parts of the United States—yet were far cleaner. If this was the result of a militant patrol of anti-litter officers meting out vicious punishments for misplaced cigarette butts, the fact was well concealed. There was *less* visible warning against littering there than in many American parks, and nowhere near enough police to watch for every possible violation—but there was less litter. I had the strong feeling that the main reason was a fundamentally different attitude of the residents toward their land.

I wasn't there long enough to determine exactly how it worked, but I did come away convinced—or reminded—that the most important mechanisms for quality control in societies are far subtler than the wording of their laws. Just what the mechanisms are and how they work—and what might work better in the future—seems well worth a lot of thought. ■

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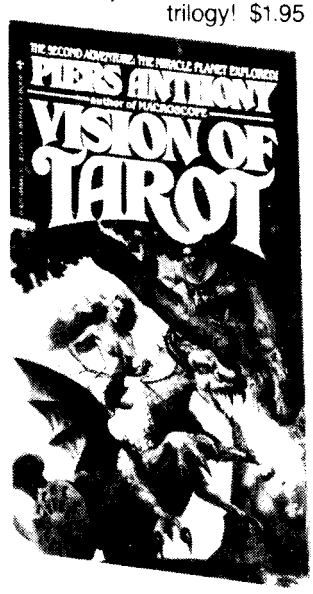

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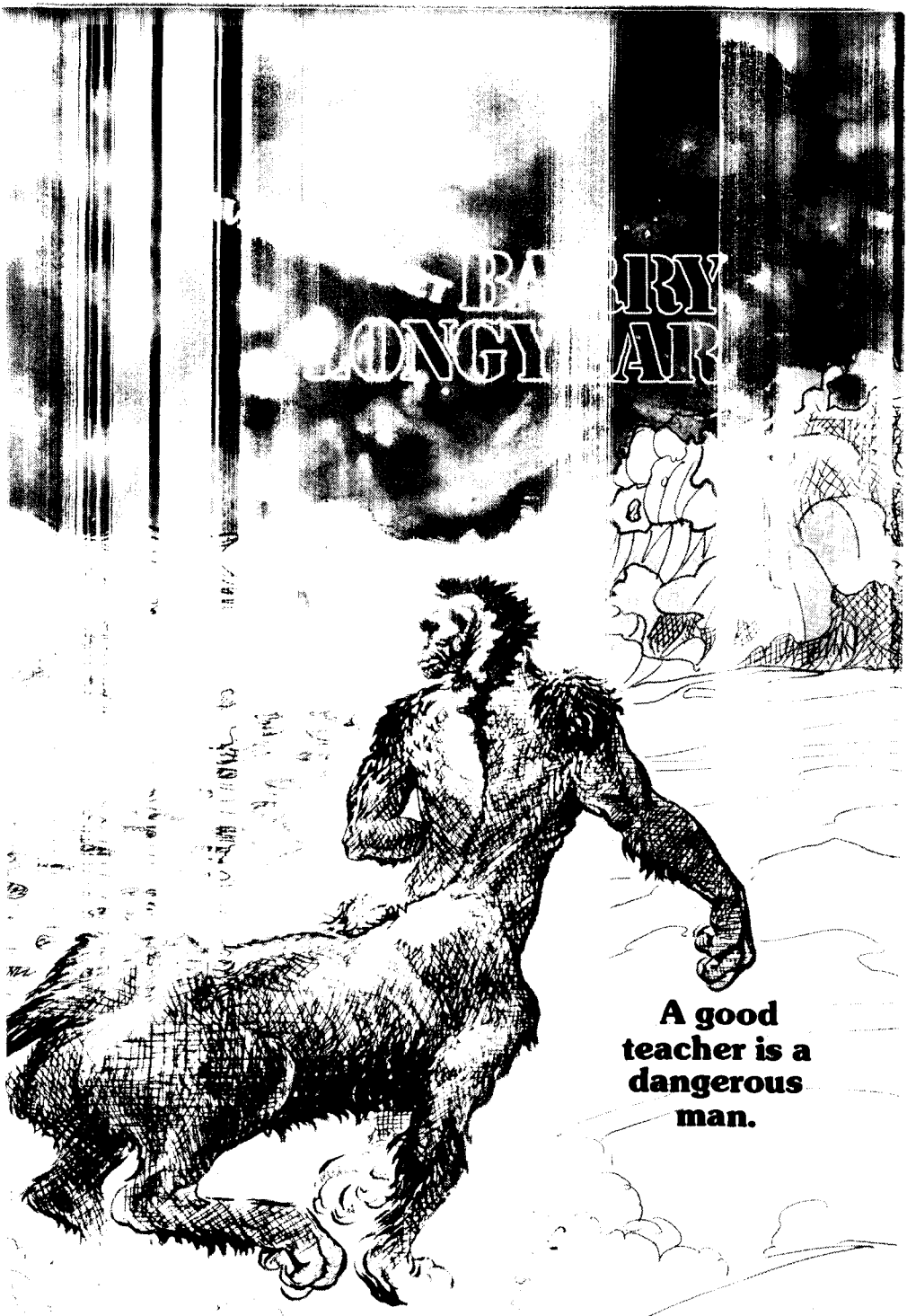

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Armath squatted in the snow as his deep red eyes studied the two tracked vehicles in the valley below. The wind gusted, causing a light rain of fine snow to fall upon his broad, hairy back. As two creatures emerged from one of the vehicles, Armath drew back his lips, exposing gleaming white fangs. A low growl rumbled deeply from his throat and he pawed the fluffy snow with dagger-tipped fingers.

"Hey, Charlie! Bring the caps!"

A third creature emerged from one of the vehicles; it walked over to the other two, and handed something to them. The first two stooped over and dug at the snow while the third watched them. Armath looked at the marks the vehicles had made over the floor of the valley. Twenty times the vehicles had stopped, and as many times the creatures had emerged, buried something, then climbed back into the roaring metal carts. The two stood, waved at the one vehicle, then the three of them climbed into the second. The carts roared to life, then moved away.

Armath's heavy black brows wrinkled as the carts kept going instead of following the pattern that had been established. He waited a moment longer, then rose on his four walking legs, shook his heavy mane to free it from the accumulation of snow, and began walking toward the most recent burial site. His eyes darted left and right, instinctively searching for darkness against the snow. Halfway down the slope, he spotted another male. Armath reared up, bellowed, and held out his arms, fingers and claws extended. The other male reared up and returned the bellow. They both came down together and altered their paths slightly to avoid meeting.

Armath's new course took him away from the nearest burial site, and he chose another. As he approached it, he saw the other male squatting at one of the first sites, and clawing at the snow. He turned back to see the disturbed area, marked with a tiny orange flag. Five paces from the flag, the snow around Armath seemed to erupt with an ear shattering slam. He fell to the shaking snow, covered his eyes, and howled as lumps of ice struck his back. When the ice stopped falling, Armath uncovered his eyes and stood, his ears ringing.

The tiny orange flag was gone. Cautiously he approached the site and saw a hole that extended deep into the snow, through the frozen soil, into the hard rock beneath. He frowned and looked toward another site. It too was nothing but a hole. Armath turned to look at the other male and saw him crumpled next to the site he had been investigating. Armath growled, then fell silent as he padded toward the other male. He was lying on the snow, his back toward Armath, the wind blowing back his long black hair, showing the grey skin beneath.

Armath halted the customary four paces away. "You!" The male did not move. "You!" Armath bellowed. Still nothing. Armath traversed a circle, four paces from the reclining figure, until he came to the male's other side. Armath looked down at the hole in the

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snow. It too went all the way to the rock of the valley floor. He looked up at the other male and howled. His face was missing.

On the liner to Bendadn to accept his post of chair of the Bendadn School Department of History, Michael studied two texts on the planet and its population. The Benda had evolved to dominate other life forms, and had been at the brink of its Iron Age, when RMI put down its ships and missionaries preaching the creed of the bountiful god of multi-planetary corporate domination. Earth was signatory to neither the Ninth Quadrant Council of Planets, nor the United Quadrants. However, both bodies had made clear to RMI that invading Bendadn with a combination of money and mercenaries would incur opposition by the combined armed forces of both organizations. Michael picked up the senior high-school text that was RMI's secret weapon: *Manifest Destiny—A History Of Human Expansionism.*

Michael again opened the text and leafed through it. He had finished reading the thing eight days before, and it still hadn't changed. Michael shook his head. Some fantasy writer must have collaborated with an advertising copywriter to produce *Manifest*. Certainly no historian had anything to do with it. It was a simplistic, highly romanticized, overblown account of the human expansion into space, ignoring the warts and highlighting the invincible, inevitable nature of human force. The message was clear: humanity, because of its nature and tradition, was meant to rule. Willing subjugation meant peace and prosperity; resistance meant destruction. Michael closed the text with a snap. "What drivel."

He leaned back on his couch and closed his eyes. At first he'd refused to take the top history post, but as the good Mr. Sabin had pointed out, "you're selling your professional soul for eleven hundred a month; why not sell for twenty-five hundred? It's the same soul in either case." A good point, thought Michael. Whether or not my soul is for sale is the concern of principle; how much is only the concern of economics and bargaining. The crime is no more severe by being a high ranked flunky rather than a middle or low ranked flunky. Michael nodded. The good Mr. Sabin had a definite way with words.

Michael closed his eyes and clenched his jaw. Then he shook his head. Opening his eyes, he leaned his head against the back of the seat. *No one who has sold out has a right to be bitter,* he thought. *Why am I doing this? As the good Mr. Sutton replied when asked why he robbed banks: "That's where the money is."* He nodded and tried to sleep. *Recognize it, accept it, and to hell with it.*

A week to Bendadn, and Michael Fellman parked his water wagon and headed toward the ship's lounge for the first time. He had played with a vague

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thought of using his experience on Bendadn as an excuse for turning over a new leaf, but as the trip and his studies of *Manifest* dragged on, his resolve wore as thin as the cliché. As he slouched in an overpadded booth sipping his fifth martini, he had to admit that Rolf Mineral Industries allowed one to sell out in style.

"Mind if I join you?"

Michael looked up and made out the face of Jacob Lynn, RMI's Project Manager for Bendadn. The man who would be the top RMI man on the planet. Michael held out a hand. "Be my guest, *sahib.*"

Lynn raised his eyebrows, then laughed as he sat and placed his drink on the table. "You ivory tower hypocrites really kill me." He sipped at his drink, then laughed again as he lowered it to the table.

"Perhaps you could share the cause of your amusement, Mr. Lynn."

His face in smiles, but his eyes colder than RMI steel, Lynn leaned back and studied Michael. "I've been wandering around the lounge listening to some of you old mossbacks bitching and whining about life in general, and their own places in it in particular."

Michael nodded. "And, Mr. Lynn, you are pleased with your place in this universe?"

"Yes." He nodded and sipped again from his drink. "There are still things that I want, but now that I've made my peace with reality, I know I'll get most of them." He smiled and waved a hand in the direction of a booth full of greying instructors working hard with the free booze, trying to forget its price. "Look at them. For the first time in their lives they are being practical. But, all they can do is pickle their heads to try and ease the pain of growing up."

"You seem to take a perverse pleasure in their distress, Mr. Lynn." Michael sipped again at his martini. "Particularly when they in all likelihood don't even understand why they are unhappy."

Lynn nodded, then faced Michael. "But you understand it, Fellman. That's why you're the biggest hypocrite in the bunch. And, yes, I do enjoy it." Lynn finished off his drink and motioned to a steward for a refill. "The reason isn't too hard to understand, Fellman. When I left the university, after having you dream merchants stuff my head with nonsense for four years, reality slammed me right in the face. Every ideal you people implanted in my skull was a program for disaster. You didn't teach me what I had to do to survive in reality as it is. No, you and your fuzzy-headed colleagues taught me what you thought reality *should* be." Lynn laughed, then took his fresh drink from the steward. "And, here you all are, putting should be on the back burner while dancing to the tune of what is—if you'll pardon the mixed metaphor." He nodded and grinned. "I once had an instructor who was very picky about mixed metaphors. Now she's working for me as a secretary."

Michael raised his eyebrows, then finished off his drink. He lowered the glass, then frowned. "Tell me, Mr. Lynn. Why do I get the feeling that you

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want me to argue with you; to tell you that ideals are still important?"

"You're drunk."

"Which does not answer the question I have put to you."

Lynn looked for a moment at the overhead, then brought his glance down to look at Michael. "Maybe I'd like to see you put up at least a little fight; something to tell me that those years I wasted in and after college were worth something. You know, when I finally made my peace with reality and got with the program, I felt guilty—like I was betraying myself. I didn't stop feeling guilty until I saw you characters being frozen out of teaching positions, and finally hopping on the RMI bandwagon." He shook his head. "And all the time the truth was staring me right in the face."

"Truth?"

"Biology. Any life form faced with the circumstances of its environment must either adapt to those circumstances or perish."

"And you have adapted?"

Lynn nodded. "And so have you, finally. And there really wasn't any choice, was there? Powerful blocs of capital, labor, and governmental force are the circumstances of our environment, and those blocs aren't ruled by foggy ideals, Fellman, but by pragmatics, pure pragmatics."

Michael shrugged. "I still have the feeling that you expect some kind of protest from me."

Lynn curled his lip. "Don't you just make yourself the least little bit sick? Where are all those ideals you and your bunch held so dear?" he smirked.

Michael motioned for another drink. "They went the way of the snail darter and the dodo, Mr. Lynn. As you put it, I have adapted." Lynn narrowed his eyes and stared at Michael for a moment, then he left his half-finished drink on the table, stood and walked quickly from the lounge. Michael took his fresh drink from the steward and gulped it down. As he held the glass in his hand, he glanced at the door through which Jacob Lynn had disappeared. He looked back at his glass and nodded. "Of course, some of us adapt better than others." He studied the glass until it shattered in his hand.

Armath squatted sullenly as his wives moved away from the eating fire. He watched Nanka, his head wife, as she went to the edge of the forest and brought back an armload of wood for the fire. He studied her short, golden fur, her sleek flanks, and gracefully arched back. He scratched at the long black fur on his shoulder. "Need not burn all wood in forest, wife. The eating is done."

Nanka tossed her head to one side, added another stick to the fire, then dropped the wood at the fire's edge. Armath frowned, then folded his arms. "You not speak."

Nanka squatted by the fire. "Husband. I speak for your wives. Our *Tueh* is almost ended—"

"Stop!" Armath reared back, then settled to the fire under Nanka's unblinking stare. "Hear no more of this, wife."

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"Must talk, Armath. Your duty to your wives—"

"No!" Armath growled, then swiped at the snow with a clawed hand. "No talk! Enough!"

Nanka studied her husband for a moment, then looked down at the fire. "Last *Tueh* season, when you saw the male killed in the valley, then the teachers came. This started. Armath, you sired only six females last season. This season you have sired none. Is our *Dishah* to die, Armath?"

Armath scratched at his shoulder and frowned. He lowered his hand, then brought up both hands and folded his arms. "The school, Nanka. You have not seen it. You do not understand." He looked at her steadily.

"The school." Nanka nodded, then drew her left arm down her flanks. "You get from this school what your wives exist to give you?"

Armath lowered his head and shook it. "No. You no understand the school...it..." He shook his head again. He looked up an Nanka. "Join the others. I talk no more." As she rose and loped off toward the edge of the forest, Armath looked back to the fire. The little grey human and his assistants had been teaching at the big houses for three winters. The Benda males would watch, listen, and hear of the mighty human advance through space—a huge rock reeling down a steep hill, with other races nothing but feeble blades of grass. Armath looked up from the fire to see his wives talking together at the edge of the forest. He rose, shook his head and moved away from them to seek the soothing solitude of the frozen river.

At his unit in the lavish instructors' complex, Michael Fellman put down his history of the Roman Empire, removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes. He looked at his watch, noted the time, then mentally calculated the remaining Bendadn minutes left before his self-appointed happy hour. He looked at the bottle on his clothes dresser, then stood. "To hell with it." He went to the dresser, uncapped the bottle, and poured a glass full of straight gin. Returning to his chair, he sipped at the drink, closed his eyes, and let the familiar taste of juniper berries fill his mouth. He smiled, remembering that he had taken to drinking martinis in an effort to curb his drinking. Michael hated the taste of gin—once, long ago. Since then he had acquired a taste for the stuff. He raised his glass to his lips, then the chimes sounded.

He stood, went to the door and opened it. Standing outside, his overcoat collar hunched against the cold, stood a frowning Dale Stevenson. "Oh, it's you. Won't you come in? I was just about to have a drink."

Stevenson nodded, then walked through the door. "Doctor Fellman, I've come to speak with you about something pretty important."

Michael closed the door, then moved back to his chair. "You can dispose of your own coat." He sipped at his drink as Stevenson removed his coat and tossed it on a chair. Stevenson pulled up his sweater as he turned and with-

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drew a large envelope that had been hidden there. "What have you got hidden there, Dale?"

Stevenson held out the envelope, then walked to the dresser and poured himself a generous quantity of gin. "Something I want you to read."

Michael weighed the thing then chuckled. "What is it? Your draft on the history of human conquest?"

Stevenson took a chair across from Michael, reached out a hand, tapped the envelope with his finger. "It's a confidential RMI report. It's a biological study that was done on Bendadn by the company five years ago."

Michael shrugged. "I have no interest in biology. And, what are you doing with this report? We're not exactly in the inner circle around here."

Stevenson gulped his drink, twisted his face until the fumes cleared his lungs, then lowered his glass. "I had it stolen from Lynn's office."

Michael raised his eyebrows. "How very imaginative of you, Dale. Would you mind informing me why you placed both of our positions in jeopardy in this manner?"

Stevenson lowered his glass after his second gulp, then nodded. "Doctor, do you know anything about the sexual habits of the Benda?"

"Not a thing."

"Didn't you wonder why males are the only students?"

Michael frowned. "The black-haired ones? I had no idea they were all male. I had supposed that the blond ones were on a lower social scale—you know, something racial."

Stevenson shook his head, finished his drink, then stood and went again to the dresser. As he poured, he talked. "The Benda are all females at birth."

"Interesting, but how do they manage to reproduce?"

Stevenson took his drink and resumed his seat. "It's all in the report. When they are young, all during their growing up years, they have competitions, fights, and eventually combats to determine a pecking order of sorts. The ones who wind up on top become males. They then form a harem of females around each male. That's what they call a *Dishah*. That's the family unit on Bendadn." Stevenson paused as he took a long pull at his drink.

Michael looked at the envelope on his lap. "I suppose it's of some interest to someone, but why a confidential report on it—and, I might add, why did you steal it?"

"In college I had a minor in evolutionary biosystems. It's a hobby, I guess. That's why the Benda interested me in a biological sense. Because of their method of reproduction and the social organizations that were determined by it, it is almost impossible that the Benda evolved to become a sentient, time-binding race." Stevenson shook his head. "That's why my ears perked up when I overheard a couple of clerks talking at the executive complex about a proposed update on this report. To make a long story short, I heard enough to prompt me to spread around a few credits to get a copy."

Michael shrugged. "I only hope your dedication to history is as com-

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mendable as your interest in biology." He tossed the envelope onto his coffee table. "However, it's not my subject."

Stevenson studied Michael for a moment. "Doctor, there's only two things you have to know about that report. The first is that males in this race are determined by conquest. Females are determined by being dominated."

"I know, the competition thing—"

"The other thing you should know is that the Benda look upon our little history course that we give them as a form of competition."

"What are you talking about?"

"Every reproducing male within RMI's claim area is in a position to compare his race's history with that of another race—that towering monument of lies called *Manifest Destiny.*"

Michael sighed. "I still don't see what you're driving at. None of us are happy with the texts, but we knew what the job was when we took it."

Stevenson put his glass on the coffee table, stood, and put on his coat. "I guess I misread you for all these years, Doctor. I'm sorry to have taken up your time."

Michael stood and faced Stevenson. "What do you mean?"

"You're rather a cynical character now, aren't you, Doctor?"

Michael sighed again and held out his hand. "What ever does any of this have to do with me?"

Stevenson shook his head. "When a Benda male recognizes he is dominated, he reverts and becomes female again. What do you *think* will happen to the Benda after all the reproducing males have reverted?" He paused.

Michael's eyes widened. "Come now, Dale, I can't believe that."

Stevenson pointed at the coffee table. "Then, Doctor, I suggest you break your rule and read something in biology! I think you'll find it has a lot to do with the history you've been teaching."

"How?"

"In that report is an outline for *Manifest Destiny.*" Stevenson opened the door. "RMI is having us—you, me and the others—the company is having us teach an entire race to death!" Stevenson walked through the open door, slamming it behind him. Michael picked up the envelope, pulled the report from it, then sat down and turned to the first page.

Jacob Lynn looked up in surprise as Michael Fellman burst into his office unannounced. Lynn's secretary followed in the historian's wake. "I'm sorry, Mr. Lynn, he just walked right past me, and—"

Lynn waved a hand. "It's all right." The secretary scowled at Michael, then turned and left, closing the door. "Fellman, what's this all about?"

Michael took a bound sheaf of papers from under his arm and he dropped it on Lynn's desk. "That."

Lynn raised his eyebrows as he read the title on the report, then he looked at Michael. "Where did you get this?"

"Transportation problems don't interest me, Lynn. What does interest me is are you aware of what's stated in that report?"

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Lynn leaned back in his chair and half closed his eyes. "Of course."

"Well?"

"Well what?"

Michael studied the project manager. With each sweep of his eyes, new information presented itself. "You knew all along about this."

"Of course."

"Why? This will mean the death of the Benda race!"

Lynn smiled and shook his head. "You're overstating things, Fellman. We're not doing this outside the claim area." He shook his head again, then fixed Michael to the floor with his eyes. "Let me introduce you to a few realities, Fellman. Developed planets with advanced populations already are exploiting their mineral resources. Uninhabited planets are many, but expensive to investigate. Therefore, we—that is, RMI—finds itself in a position where it always has to deal with semi-barbaric populations. To maximize our profits, it is necessary that the local population cooperates."

"And death is the ultimate cooperation." There was a moment's silence.

"You said it, Fellman. I didn't."

"Which makes one helluvalot of difference, Lynn."

Lynn smiled. "Is your conscience bothering you, Doctor? Is the size of the cynicism beginning to gnaw at you? You must know that any principle that you thought worth preserving was tossed down the toilet when you signed your contract with RMI." Lynn held out his hands. "What is this performance, Fellman? Are you trying to manufacture a rationalization for your own purity?"

"Lynn, you ought to be sporting a forked tail and red suit."

Lynn frowned, then laughed. "Are you complaining because I made a better deal when I sold out than you did? Or are old ideals beginning to shake their coffin lids?"

"You know, Lynn, you are the lowest form of life that ever crawled."

Lynn, still smiling, shook his head. "No, Fellman. There we disagree. I know what I'm doing, and I accept it. You are doing the same thing and crying about it. At least I'm honest. What does that make you, Fellman? You and the rest of your ivory tower crew?"

"What does that make me?" Michael sat on the crude stone wall overlooking the encampments of five of the Benda families. Each family was removed from the others by distance and strict custom. The families had moved from their permanent sites in order that their males could attend his lecture at the local RMI auditorium. Michael pushed himself from the wall and began walking the rough path through the encampments back to his quarters. He thought of Stevenson's anger and Lynn's smugness, and the words Michael had uttered many years before when a young idealist at the university had sought his support in protesting some right-diminishing law. "I am tired. Too tired to again break my back on the knee of another lost cause." A coldness had crept into his heart as he made his peace with uncontestable

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power; a coldness that allowed him to sweep together a few shards of a career ruined by following impossible ideals.

As he approached the first encampment, he saw twelve young females competing to see which of them would have the strength, courage, and stamina to become males. Michael remembered a line from the report. *The Benda cannot conceptualize of an organization beyond the family level. It appears, then, that the company must either treat with separate families—with the entailing impossible conflicts inherent in such arrangements—or devise a plan that will enable the Benda to be either treated as a unity, or eliminated completely.*

Michael shook his head at the frigid sense of purpose implied by the report. The cynicism of pragmatics brought to the ultimate cynicism: the elimination of a race to achieve the kind of political stability that would attract investment capital to the RMI coffers. He watched one of the Benda females deliver a savage blow to another, sending the stricken child writhing to the dust. The victorious female whirled around on her four walking hands, motioning to her sisters to come and try their luck. Most of them hung back, but one reared up and charged. The two met with a bone-crunching thud, then were lost to view in a cloud of dust.

Michael turned and saw the females of another family similarly engaged. Then, he saw the family male squatting at the edge of the clearing, studying his children at their combat. The male's burly arms and strong back showed patches of fine blond hair amidst the black shag of his coat. The male turned his head, saw Michael, then jumped up, startled. Michael smiled and nodded his head at the Benda male. The creature only stared at the human, then hung his head and walked slowly away from the encampment.

Michael turned and hurried away.

Armath waited at the auditorium door for the opening to clear. At a break in the ingoing traffic, Armath spaced himself behind the most recent entrant the customary four paces, then moved into the huge, vaulted structure. Its size was necessary to seat the Benda students in such a manner that no two of them came any closer than four paces apart. Armath moved down the ranks, spotted an open place, then walked to it and squatted, facing the tiny stage at the front of the room. He noticed blond patches on many backs, and that the smell of *Tueh* was in the air. Armath bowed his head, sighed, and waited. After a few moments, the auditorium grew silent. The frail, grey human called Fellman entered at the front of the room and climbed up on the stage before them.

He placed his papers on the lectern, adjusted the microphone, then looked at the assembled males. "Humans will bury you." The words echoed throughout the auditorium. Armath frowned, for the human's style had changed. "If this were a classroom full of humans, there would be talking, laughing, playing about. But not with *you*." Armath could feel the scorn washing from the

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lectern across the students. "You *can't* talk with your neighbor, can you? Look at you. Look at yourselves squatting as though each one of you was an island unto himself." Armath looked and saw the other Benda males also looking around.

"Do any of you know why you sit apart like that? I'm asking a question. Do any of you know?"

Armath stood. "It is our custom."

Fellman nodded. "How is it that it became a custom? Can you answer that?"

Armath held out his hands. "It has always been so."

The human motioned with his hand. "Sit back down." He looked over the audience for a long moment, then fixed one of the males in the front row with his eyes. "You!" The student stood. "Why are we speaking my language—the language of humans?"

The Benda frowned, then shrugged. "Our own language is not . . .it is not complex as is yours. Our only need of language is to care for our *Dishah*. We needed nothing more before the humans came to Bendadn."

Fellman nodded. "And we *are* here, aren't we? And you will all die because we came—because we are *better* than you!"

Armath swallowed as the last echoes of the human's challenge faded. Inside his chest he felt a tightening. The human walked from behind the lectern, then went from one end of the stage to the other, looking over the students. He returned to the lectern and leaned his arms on it. "The custom of separation dates back before the earliest memory of your oldest. Before the custom, a male chancing to meet another would enter combat to decide who was the stronger." Fellman nodded. "Of course you know what happened to the loser. You know because it's happening to all of *you!*"

The tightening in Armath's chest grew, and he recognized it to be anger. The human removed his arms from the lectern and held them behind his back. "Your ancestors were at least intelligent enough to see that this reduced an already small male population. Hence, it was agreed, long ago, that there was no challenge between males beyond four paces. This solved the problem, but it also eliminated the need for one male to talk to another. You cannot even talk to your own fathers if they can still reproduce, can you?" Fellman shook his head. "That's why you are nothing, and will remain nothing, until your race is extinct!"

Armath snarled and stood, along with several other Benda. His fingers ached to rip the little man apart, but other Benda had him boxed in on all four sides and corners. Fellman pointed his finger at Armath. "You!"

The growls among the Benda quieted. Armath held his head high, his eyes flashing. "Yes, human?"

"You want to come up here, do you not?"

Armath nodded and flexed his fingers. "Yes. Ah, *yes!*"

Fellman moved a little to his left and pointed at the four-pace wide path between Armath and the stage. "There is a clear path. Walk through there."

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Armath looked at the two Benda males flanking the entrance to the path. He saw the hair on one rise as the fellow stood. Then the male looked at Fellman, then back at Armath. Then he nodded. The male across from him nodded as well. The human screamed from the lectern. "Tell him it's all right! Tell him with *words,* dammit!"

The male to Armath's right looked at the human, then back to Armath. He held out a fist, then opened his hand, pointing it toward the human. "Pass."

The Benda male across from him nodded and held out his hand. "Pass."

Armath moved forward, his body tense, as he passed between the two males, then approached the next pair. They repeated the gesture by holding out their hands toward the stage.

"Pass."

"Pass."

Armath walked between the two rows, stopping before each new pair, with each new pair holding out their hands toward the stage.

"Pass."

"Pass."

As he left the last pair behind and stood before the stage, he discovered to his amazement that he was no longer angry. Instead, his mind was filled with the wonder of what had just transpired. The auditorium was silent. Fellman walked to the edge of the stage. "Come up here."

Armath walked the five steps to the stage and moved to the lectern. He stopped four paces from the human. Fellman glared at him and pointed at a spot on the stage next to the lectern. Armath reared up a bit, blew in and out a few times, then stood next to the human. Fellman turned to the auditorium and folded his arms. To the Benda males seated in the ranks, he appeared foolish and small standing next to the tall, husky Armath. The odd couple stood together until the picture was firmly implanted in everyone's mind. Then the human spoke into the microphone. "All over this universe there is life that has a special quality. Humans have this quality; the Benda has this quality. You are not creatures of instinct, Benda. You are not slaves to the universe's whim. You are creatures of choice. What you are is by choice; what you will become is by choice—*your* choice." Fellman looked at Armath, then returned his gaze to the assembled Benda males. "My job is to teach you about human history. That history has been one of expansionism, conquest, and oppression." The little grey man rubbed his chin, then dropped his hand to his side. "But no race has a longer history of resisting human oppression, conquest, and expansion than do the humans themselves." Fellman tapped the papers on his lectern and spoke to Armath without looking at him. "Read this to the others." The man turned, left the stage, then left the auditorium.

Armath moved to the lectern, his heart stopping as he realized that he was about to talk—to talk to a room full of males. He swallowed, looked down at the papers, and studied them to keep from looking at the sea of faces before him. His eyes dashed over the

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hand-printed lines, then he frowned and looked back at the faces. "The human...the human has left us a story." He looked back at the paper, swallowed, then looked back at the males. "In a land far away, in a time long ago, there was a man. He was a hard man among hard men; he was a solitary man among solitary men. In the midst of a powerful empire, he was a slave, and this man's name was Spartacus..."

The winter closed, Bendadn saw its brief summer, then once again the winds brought the snow as two males met in the forest. Armath squatted in the field and turned to Januth. "Why do we meet here, Januth?"

Januth raised his brows and held out his hands. "Armath, can you imagine us meeting in my camp, or yours? Think of the females."

Armath nodded. "They would be disturbed." He rubbed his chin. "I wonder...about educating the females. What would the human, Fellman, think of that?"

"Armath, you are closer to the human than any of us. That is why I would ask you a question."

Januth frowned and scratched at the new black hair on his arm. "This human, Spartacus, and the few humans who fought the Persians at that pass...in the mountains..."

"Thermopylae."

Januth nodded. "And the human Hale who hung, and all those others. Humans who faced impossible odds, it is true. But, they all failed."

"What is your question?"

"I feel that Fellman would have us ...become something different, something better, stronger." Januth held out his hands, then dropped them. "But the examples he gives us all fail. What is the purpose of this?"

Armath studied the ground, then looked into Januth's eyes. "Can there be, Januth, something more important than the *Dishah*? We serve our own lives, and that of our *Dishah*. That is how it has always been, and it is good." Armath frowned, then held out a hand in Januth's direction. "But, is there something more important? The humans Fellman talks of. They failed, but they...failed serving something more important than themselves. Perhaps that is the lesson Fellman would have us learn."

Januth shrugged. "He would have us serve something more important?"

Armath nodded. "It is what I think."

"What would he have us serve?"

Armath shook his head. "I do not know. One thing I do know is that he teaches us that the contest with power is never won or lost until one side or the other breathes its last. Our contest is not over. Who is the stronger is still to be decided."

Januth smiled. "Do you...do you mean..."

Armath grinned and held out his black-haired arms. "Yes. Soon my home will be crawling with screaming, squabbling brats!"

A month later, a strange human

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waited in the darkness of the back of the RMI auditorium furthest from the company administrative complex. He observed the Benda males, totally absorbed in talk, moving into the great room together and crowding toward the small raised stage where they squatted, shoulder to shoulder. When the auditorium was half-full, the Benda lowered their chatter, then became silent as a greying human entered and climbed up onto the stage. He moved to the lectern, placed some notes upon it, then adjusted the microphone. "Questions."

Several hairy black hands rose. The man pointed at one of them and a huge Benda male stood. "Fellman, if the Benda is to serve something larger, more important than any one of us, or any one *Dishah*, what is it that we should serve?"

The human nodded. "I am a human. What makes me better than you is that I can devise and choose those things that I serve. You are Benda. It is not for me to devise and choose the things that you will serve. You are creatures of choice, then *choose*." The greying human looked to his notes. "Today I will talk to you of manifest destiny—"

A moan rose from the assembled males. One male close to the front stood. "Fellman, we *choose* not to hear any more of that trash. It is trash, and you have said so yourself." The male's comment was greeted with growls of approval.

The little grey man smiled. "You speak of a book; I speak of an ideal—the true destiny of humans, and of other intelligent races."

The male standing cocked his head to one side. "Is this the destiny of the Benda as well?"

Another male stood and spoke to the first. "Fellman said that such things are a matter of choice. We cannot choose until we listen and understand."

Both males squatted on the floor. The human turned to his notes. "Intelligent life rules other life. But it is not the destiny of intelligent life to rule intelligent life. The destiny of intelligent life is *not to be ruled.* As creatures of choice, it is our nature to be free to choose. Rule is existence by the choice of others as instinct is existence by the choice of nature. Today we will begin a study of the history of human progress and revolution..."

The Benda males, absorbed in thought, did not notice the other human at the back of the auditorium moving from the shadows, then walking rapidly out of the building.

Jacob Lynn leaned back in his chair and nodded at the biologist. "All right, Hyman. You've had a look around. Now tell me why things are not following the projections in your report."

Hyman pushed a thin wisp of brown hair from his watery blue eyes. "It's your boy Fellman."

"Fellman?"

Hyman nodded. "He's made the entire *Manifest Destiny* program into a laughingstock. In addition, he has the Benda males discussing matters that should be far beyond them. Extremely

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dangerous matters," he said pointedly.

Lynn frowned. "Such as?"

Hyman shrugged. "He's got them talking philosophy, politics, revolution, for example."

"*What?*"

Hyman nodded. "In addition, none of the males I've observed have reverted. By now they should have stopped reproducing altogether. Somehow, Fellman has convinced the Benda that they are, if not superior to humans, at least not to be dominated by humans. I'm afraid that simply removing Fellman and the other teachers who are helping him will not reverse the process. The damage is done."

"What do you suggest?"

Hyman sighed, then shrugged. "There appears to be little alternative. You must convince the Benda—once and for all—that they are inferior. And this must be done in a manner understandable to the Benda."

Lynn rubbed the back of his neck. "What are you suggesting?"

"A confrontation. A demonstration of force." Hyman smiled. "I'm certain that you can devise a pretext that will satisfy the Ninth Quadrant Supervisory Forces."

Lynn pulled at his lower lip, then nodded. "In fact, if it is worked properly, I might even be able to get the Quadrant Forces to do the dirty work." He leaned forward. "One thing more. Your report said that the Benda males cannot act in concert. How can we provoke something that will appear to be an uprising?"

Hyman rubbed his chin and studied the toes of his shoes, then he looked up. "Fellman has them sitting and talking together. Perhaps he has made our task very simple by making it possible for the Benda to act together in an attempt at force." He nodded and held up a finger. "One thing."

"What's that?"

"Fellman and his bunch must not leave the planet. Since they are aware of the report, it wouldn't do to have them wandering around Earth, talking." Hyman stood and walked toward the door. He paused and looked back at Lynn. "There is an alternative—but I suppose you know that."

"Know what, Hyman?"

"If Fellman's efforts result in a unified Benda race, RMI will have a political entity with which to deal for minerals. It will cut into the profits some, but no more than on any other planet RMI has invested in."

Lynn nodded. "I'll be getting in touch with you later, Hyman." The biologist nodded and left the office. Lynn swung his chair around and stared at the map behind his desk. On it were marked the many test boring sites that had uncovered rich deposits of hematite, silver, tunsten, zinc, lead—a treasurehouse of metals. He tapped his fingertips upon the armrests of his chair, then he swung back and punched a code into his desk's tiny keyboard.

"Thorpe here."

"This is Lynn."

"Yes, Mr. Lynn."

"Thorpe, I want you to prepare to have a full crew move into the Javuud Valley tomorrow. I want full scale pro-

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duction to be reached within the next two weeks."

"Yes sir, but the transfer of mineral rights hasn't been completed."

"Let me worry about that. And Thorpe?"

"Yes, Mr. Lynn."

"I'll be having a full security company with your crew for protection."

"Is there a need? I mean, has there been some trouble recently that I should be aware of?"

"Just taking precautions." Lynn cut off the communication, then stared at the door through which the biologist had left. Lynn's eyes narrowed as he clenched his fists. "It's not profits, Hyman. It's *Fellman!*"

Dale Stevenson felt the bite of the morning chill as he walked from his quarters at the subschool to the local RMI auditorium. There were many things that had to be prepared as Doctor Fellman made his circuit of RMI subschools. First, the auditorium had to be opened, which was the easy part. After the lecture, as the mass of Benda males divided into discussion groups, Stevenson and the other discussion group leaders would again be embroiled in the telling questions and spirited arguments of the students for the next nine days. Then Fellman would appear for a lecture and begin the process all over again.

As he approached the door to the auditorium, he nodded at the students gathered there, then he motioned to the RMI security guard standing beside the door. "Let's open it up."

The guard shook his head. "My orders are to keep these doors closed."

Stevenson sighed. "Look...what's your name?"

"Bartlet, Mr. Stevenson."

"Then you know who I am."

"Yes sir. But my orders come from Mr. Lynn. The auditorium is to remain closed for the day."

Stevenson held out his hands. "There is some mistake, Mr. Bartlet. This auditorium has to be open for Doctor Fellman to deliver his lecture."

The guard shook his head. "My orders stand until Mr. Lynn changes them. I'm sorry."

Stevenson fumed a bit, then moved to the door and tried the handle. The door rattled but would not open. He motioned to a couple of Benda males who were observing the conversation. "You two. Pull this door open."

The males grinned at each other then moved toward the door. Bartlet pulled a solid projectile weapon from the holster at his side and aimed it at Stevenson. "If they go near that door, Stevenson, I have orders to shoot!"

Stevenson's eyes widened, then he laughed. "Nonsense!" He turned back to the two Benda and pointed at the door. "Go to it."

A sharp report deafened them all. The guard, his face red, looked around at the students, then back at Stevenson on the ground holding his thigh. "I told you! My orders are to shoot!"

Stevenson looked at the guard, his eyes wide and glassy with shock. "My God, man, have you lost your mind?"

"I got my orders!"

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The guard turned and faced the circle of Benda males as a low growl began at one side. He pointed his gun at a particularly huge male who began advancing. "Stand back! Stand back, or I'll shoot!" He squeezed the trigger again and again as hairy black hands reached for his throat.

Distath looked out of the door beyond his garden and examined with pleasure the rocks and fields of his *Dishah's* land. The human's lessons on property were complicated, but caused him many hours of profound thought. He rolled the words with his tongue. "Without a right to exist at some place, no other rights can exist." He nodded, then started as he saw a movement among the rocks. A Benda—a female, not of his *Dishah*. He ran from the house toward the movement, left the garden, and vaulted the low fence. As he approached the rocks, a golden female stepped forth and bowed her head. "Forgive me... forgive me this intrusion. It is my husband, Virsth."

Distath glowered at the female, then held out a hand. "What of Virsth?"

"Distath, the humans have come with great machines to take my family's land." She hung her head, then looked into the male's eyes. "Virsth sent me to warn you."

Distath swung his head back, then looked down at the female. "You realize the impropriety of a female not of my *Dishah* being on my land?" He shook his shaggy head. "What care have I that the humans take *Virsth's* property? He is to care for his *Dishah*, and I mine. That is all."

The female looked up into Distath's eyes. "The humans come for your land as well, Distath. This is the message I was given to deliver... as my husband died from a wound delivered at the hands of the humans. Do with it what you will!"

Lynn's office door opened and two guards pulled a struggling Michael Fellman into the room, then released him before Lynn's desk. "Lynn, what are you—"

"You're fired." Lynn returned to the papers on his desk. "If you are found anywhere on company property you will be arrested under Quadrant Savage Planet Regulations as a trespasser." He glanced up. "That's all."

Five days later, as his shuttle touched down at the RMI field on Bendadn, Damon Stirnak watched from his view port as Jacob Lynn crossed the tarmac toward the craft. He heard the shuttle door open, then waited, and watched. Lynn hesitated at the bottom step, then moved into the shuttle. Stirnak did not rise as Lynn entered the passenger compartment, nor did he offer a seat. Lynn appeared to Stirnak to be having difficulties about what to do with his hands. They clasped in front, then went off to hide themselves in his trouser pockets. Stirnak leaned his head back against the seat and closed his ice-blue eyes. "Stop fidgeting."

"Yes, Mr. Stirnak." Lynn took a deep breath and halted his nervous movements through sheer will.

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"You know, of course, why I am here, don't you?"

"No sir. I was only notified of your arrival a few minutes ago."

"Surely when your office applied for military assistance under the QSP Regulations it knew that the fact would come to the attention of RMI."

Lynn shrugged. "Of course, but everything is well in hand. I see no need for an Executive Office investigator."

Stirnak nodded, then opened his eyes and fixed Lynn to the deck. "Lynn, what is going on down here?"

Lynn wet his lips. "It's all in the application for assistance, Mr. Stirnak. There have been four attacks on RMI facilities by locals--"

"Why? Why have these attacks happened? According to the Hyman Report, submitted by your office five years ago, the locals should now be a whipped and dying population."

"I can explain."

"Do."

Lynn wet his lips again. "It's Fellman and some of the other instructors RMI hired to staff the school system. They turned everything around, making the locals hostile."

"How did this happen?"

Lynn shrugged. "I did not screen the applicants for those positions. That's a Main Office headache."

Stirnak rubbed his chin, closed his eyes, then opened them again. "Lynn, I am going to give you a free hand with this problem."

"Thank you, Mr. Stirnak."

Stirnak held up a hand and shook his head. "Save your thanks, Lynn. I'm putting you on the spot."

Lynn frowned. "Sir?"

"The *Manifest Destiny* plan was cooked up and submitted by your office. RMI has made and will make no official notice of resolving the situation. You are on your own."

"I see." Lynn nodded. "If everything works out, I'm a hero, but—"

"—but, if this all falls apart, Lynn, you will find yourself in a high wind, and very much alone." Stirnak motioned to a seat opposite his. "First sit, then tell me what you plan to do about the Benda."

Several mornings later, Dale Stevenson, hobbling on an improvised crutch, spotted Michael Fellman at the edge of the clearing that the instructors had been camping in. He pursed his lips against the ache in his leg, and moved toward him. Fellman looked up. "It's good to see you up and around, Dale." Michael pointed at the leg. "And how is your badge of courage?"

Stevenson snorted as he came to a halt. "Michael, if you think for an instant, that if I thought that guard was serious, I would have. . .well, you'd be as ready for a soft-walled room as the rest of us are." Stevenson cocked his head back toward the collection of rough lean-tos that housed the former RMI Department of History on Bendadn. "Look at us, Michael. Flabby, grey, weak, and without half an idea between us as to how to survive on our own, much less as savages."

Michael looked at the camp, saw several faces turned in his direction. As

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they noticed his looking back, the faces turned away. Michael looked at Stevenson. "Have you been put up as a spokesman of some kind?"

"I guess I have. Look, you know as well as any of us how impossible our situation is. You know what the winter is like on Bendadn. I doubt if any of us can survive it like this."

Michael shrugged. "What would you have me do about it?"

Stevenson shook his head. "I don't know. Get in touch with Lynn. Ask him for a deal."

"What kind of deal? We don't have anything he wants."

Stevenson looked into Michael's eyes for an instant, then averted his glance. "We have one thing."

Michael studied Stevenson, then as his mouth opened in surprise, he pointed at the camp. "You...and the others. You want me to tell Lynn that we'll go back and implement his damnable *Manifest Destiny* plan?"

Stevenson kept his gaze down as he nodded. "What good are we doing like this? I ask you, what good? If Kurst over there hadn't had a smattering of medical training, I'd be dead right now. The same thing for those two Benda males who got wounded with me. Michael, in a couple of months we aren't going to have anything to *eat*!"

Michael sighed. "Is this the man who came to me with the Hyman Report? The same man who said that I *have* to do something?"

Stevenson shook his head. "I know. But, we aren't doing any good like this. What about the families that got tossed into the bush along with us? You and I are single, but what about the instructors with families? Could you sit and watch your son or daughter starve or freeze to death? What good are our ideals then?"

"Dale, that's when they're the most important. I'll tell you what good we've done. After you and the two Benda males were wounded, the rest of the students carried the three of you off and cared for you until we could get Kurst to you. Before we came, they wouldn't have done that—not for a human, not for a Benda."

Stevenson looked into Michael's eyes and shook his hand. "But what good are we doing *now*?"

"We are abstaining from the commission of a crime."

"Aaah—"

"Listen, Dale. When you came to me with that report, what did you have as a limit on your so-called ideals? Do what you can, Fellman, just as long as I don't lose my job?" Michael turned away, then spoke with his back toward Stevenson. "First, I doubt if the *Manifest Destiny* program can be salvaged at this point. Our students, I am proud to say, have learned too well for that. But, even if we could reverse what we've done, I doubt that Lynn would believe it, or, if he did, that he would take any of us back. In his mind, he is committed to the use of physical force." Michael turned back. "But, if any of those in the camp want to try, I have no way of stopping them."

That evening, Armath and a scatter-

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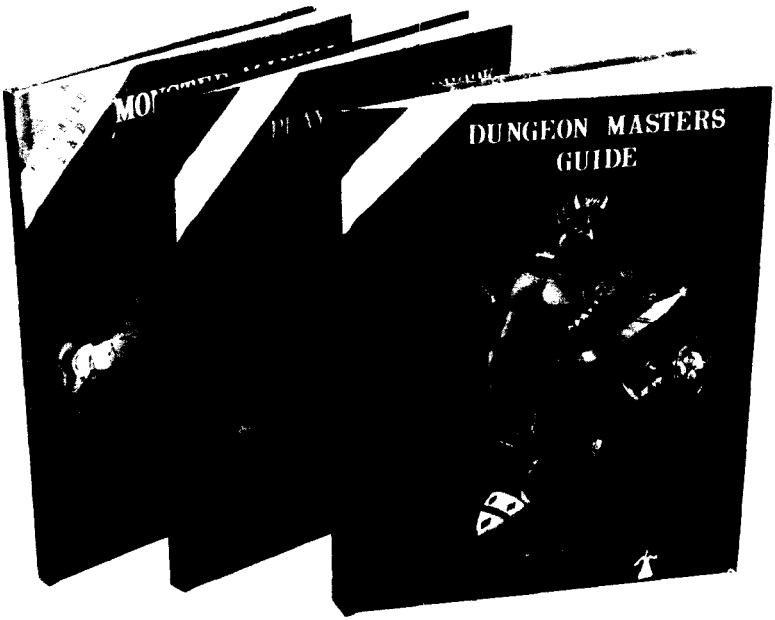
THE ULTIMATE



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ing of Benda males, looked with horror at the bodies littered across the Javuud Valley. Squads of scaled creatures moved out from the protection of the mineral extraction plant. Each one carried one of the weapons that had felled the Benda long before any of them had reached the RMI ramparts. A hairy hand shook Armath's shoulder. "The creatures seek the rest of us, Armath. We must run!"

The speaker ran off into the underbrush leaving Armath alone. The Benda male frowned as he felt the hair below his eyes and found them wet. He lowered his hand as a fist, watched the beings coming closer, then he turned and disappeared into the forest.

Michael, Stevenson, and several of the other instructors watched as the huge Benda male drew a seven-pointed star in the dirt. Armath looked up at the circle of human faces, then pointed at the star. "This sign they wore on their coverings, and their flying boats."

"That's the Ninth Quadrant insignia." One of the humans stepped forward and turned toward Michael. "Those aren't RMI guards, Fellman. Those are Ninth Quadrant troops."

Michael nodded at the man. "I can see that, DuPree. What I want to know is how RMI got the Quadrant to use its troops?" He looked up at DuPree. "You have experience in Quadrant law, don't you?"

DuPree nodded. "The only way I can figure it is that RMI asked for the protection of the Quadrant under the Savage Planet Regulations. What it amounts to is if a planet is savage, according to the law's definition of savage, a private party on such a planet can request the Quadrant to come in as a police force if a threat exists."

Michael nodded, then looked up at Armath. "Why did you do this? You cannot attack guns with bare hands."

"This is the only way we know, Fellman."

Michael nodded. "I know. I know. How many of you were lost?"

"A hundred of us charged the complex. Not more than ten escaped alive."

Michael nodded. "That a hundred of you would fight together for a common goal; this is good." He studied the star, then looked up at DuPree. "Savage?"

DuPree shrugged. "That's what they're called."

Michael turned toward Armath. "Do not be sad, Armath. Your companions joined in the right cause, but with the wrong weapons." Michael stood and turned toward the other humans. "School resumes tomorrow." He turned back to Armath. "I cannot travel the circuit as I did before. Can you spread the word to the Benda?"

Armath frowned, then nodded. "I shall have them told."

As Bendadn's chilly winds gathered, sending the white flakes of winter through trees and across fields, little grey men and little grey women stood ankle deep in snow, surrounded by hulking black bodies. At night, the humans were quartered in Benda

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camps. They earned their keep during the days with their talk. The Benda males listened, questioned, argued, then listened some more. As spring darted warm fingers into frozen draws and hollows, the lessons ended.

Ninth Quadrant Force Captain Vaakne lifted his scaled head as the orderly entered. "Jazut, this is what?"

"Captain, the Benda at gate there are."

Vaakne stood. "Attack?"

The orderly gestured in the negative. "Talk it is they want."

Captain Vaakne buckled his side-arm. "Guard to walls posted?"

The orderly gestured in the affirmative. "To walls posted, Captain."

Armath watched as the heavy Ninth Quadrant officer waddled from the mining complex gate. He looked up to see many of the scaled heads of the Quadrant soldiers looking back. The Quadrant officer waddled around the few remaining patches of ice and came to a halt in front of Armath. "*Negias sinaad, Benda?*"

Armath shook his massive head. "Does the scaled creature understand the English language?"

Vaakne's slitted eyes narrowed. "The English I speak. What is that you and the others here want?"

Armath extended a roll of papers and handed it to the officer. "Take this, creature. The papers are our constitution, the record of our election, and our government's application for representation among the planets of the Ninth Quadrant Federation." Armath pointed at the roll of papers. "In there you will find my government's demand that Ninth Quadrant Forces be removed from Bendadn. Should you not leave, Bendadn shall request the United Quadrants to remove you."

Vaakne cocked his head to one side, looked at the roll of papers in his hands, then looked back at the naked, hairy creatures that had delivered it. "Government? This not understand."

Armath scratched at his shoulder with a clawed hand. "Study the regulations for savage planets, creature, and you will see. Bendadn no longer is a savage planet, and you must leave." The six Benda males turned and left Vaakne standing alone.

On the RMI ship back to Earth, Jacob Lynn frowned and turned to the two guards who had spent the first several days of the trip following him like a shadow. "Do you have to follow me around like that? It's not like I could escape."

One of the guards shrugged, then rubbed his chin. "Where'll you be, Mr. Lynn—in case someone should ask?"

"I'm going to the ship's lounge to have a drink."

The two guards looked at each

Space *is the stature of God.* ***JOSEPH JOUBERT***

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other, shrugged, then the first guard spoke to Lynn. "Okay, but don't get lost." They turned and went back to their quarters.

Lynn moved through the corridor until it widened into the ship's lounge. He walked to the bar, obtained a double whiskey, then turned to survey the open booth seats. He saw a greying man with glasses sipping at a martini. He walked to the booth and looked down at him. "May I, Fellman?"

Michael looked up and smiled. "Be my guest, *sahib.*"

Lynn made a wry smile, then sat down. He took a swallow from his drink, then lowered it to the table. "I suppose you know what's going to happen to me?"

Michael shook his head. "Only a little. Is it true that RMI is bringing charges against you?"

Lynn snorted. "Yeah. Like I did it all by myself. I'm their scapegoat so they can remain on Bendadn. It seems that they are willing to try and work within the framework of your government, Fellman."

Michael shook his head and smiled. "It's not my government, Mr. Lynn. It's theirs."

"I suppose in some philosophical sense you think you've created your own little Utopia."

Michael sipped at his drink, then raised his eyebrows. "No, Mr. Lynn. The government of the Benda is far from perfect. Only the males can vote or serve in government. I advised them to extend those rights to the females to avoid a future headache, but as I said, it's their government." Michael studied the former project manager. "Mr. Lynn, your problems stem from failing to take your own advice."

Lynn raised an eyebrow, then he turned back to his drink. "What advice might that be?"

"Adapt to the circumstances of your environment, or go under. The environment changed, Mr. Lynn. RMI adapted; you did not."

Lynn took a swallow of his drink, then looked at Michael. "Why are you going back to Earth, Fellman? I would have thought that you would have carved a nice little place for yourself in the new society."

Michael leaned back and returned Lynn's glance. "I told you. My government isn't on Bendadn; mine is on Earth. Since leaving Earth, I've learned a little about environments, circumstances, and—if I may use the word—ideals. I'm going back to see if I can find ears willing to listen to what I have to teach."

Lynn laughed, then shook his head. "As a teacher, Fellman, you are poison on Earth. You'll die on the vine."

Michael finished off his martini, then stood and faced Lynn. "Perhaps, Mr. Lynn, but at least I'll find the vine I die on quite comfortable."

Lynn frowned. "I don't understand you at all, Fellman."

Michael smiled. "I don't doubt it." Michael Fellman turned and left the lounge. Lynn stared at the door through which the history instructor had left, then he turned and finished his drink. ■

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HOW TO GET ALONG WITH AN EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL... OR YOUR NEIGHBOR

A Shaw character wrote,
"Do not do unto others
as you would have them do unto you.
Their tastes may be different."
Especially if they're aliens. . . .

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by G. HARRY STINE

Question: What are you going to do and how are you going to act when you first meet Zork Aarrggh, an inhabitant of Beta Lycris A-3?

Answer: You are going to be very, very careful. You are going to try to understand him. And you are going to religiously follow the principles of Metalaw.

We are not only engaged today in the first steps outward to the stars, but we are also diligently searching for evidence of both extraterrestrial life and extraterrestrial intelligence. If we do happen to find extraterrestrial intelligent life, and if we happen to recognize it as such, we will attempt to communicate with it.

While this search is getting under way, a very small number of people are beginning to think about what we do if and when we finally make contact. In some ways, the situation is rather like a dog chasing a car and managing to clamp his teeth on the bumper; what is he going to do with it once he's got it? This is why this small number of people have, over the past thirty years, been thinking about possible rules of conduct and action when dealing with extraterrestrial intelligent beings. They have given birth to the new field of Metalaw.

Metalaw is just what the word implies: "meta" is a prefix denoting "above" or "beyond." Law is a system of rules of conduct and action governing the relationships between entities, rules that have been classified, reduced to order, put into the form of rules, and mutually agreed-upon. Metalaw is therefore a system of law dealing with all frames of existence and with intelligent entities of all kinds.

However, succinct as the definitions of both law and metalaw are, the rules of conduct and action that are created, classified, ordered, formed, and agreed-upon involve "intelligent beings." So, perhaps we'd better take a cut at defining what we mean by an "intelligent being."

Dictionaries say one thing. Biologists say something else. And psychologists may or may not agree with either. But the discussion can be initiated by defining an intelligent being or entity as a system having *all* of the following characteristics:

1. Self-awareness.

2. Possessed of a time-binding sense—i.e.: the ability to consider optional future actions and to act upon these considerations.

3. Creativity, which author Arthur Koestler defines as the ability to make bi-sociative syntheses of random matrices to produce new ideas or things.

4. Adaptive behavior, the capability to override the preprogrammed behavior of instinct and adapt behavior patterns to perceived present

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or potential future circumstances.

5. Empathy, the ability to make imaginative identification with another intelligent entity.

6. Communicative, able to transmit information to another intelligent being in a meaningful manner.

This list may not be complete. But, as it stands, it is a start at defining an intelligent entity. An intelligent entity must have *all* of these characteristics, and it may have more. If the entity does not have every one of them, we could not consider it to be intelligent.

Many animals, especially the higher mammals, may possess some of these characteristics . . . but not *all* of them. Dogs may be self-aware, may have a short-range time-binding sense, are highly empathetic, can communicate reasonably well but not completely, but fall short in creativity and perhaps in adaptive behavior. The Great Apes have some of these characteristics, but not all of them. Dolphins may, but that work which showed so much speculative promise a decade ago has gotten very quiet lately.

We have now built some machines that have some of these characteristics, but not all of them . . . yet. We may be able to build machines having all the characteristics of an intelligent entity, and we may be closer to doing that than many people believe. If we do create an intelligent machine, we must be ready to treat it as an intelligent entity under our rules of law. Which means we had better have metalaw well worked out very quickly.

Most human beings, regardless of the culture in which they have been born and raised, have all six of these characteristics. Not all humans possess all of the characteristics to the same degree. Some may have very little of a given characteristic, and this could be due to genetic inheritance, prenatal nutrition, or cultural training and environment. Save for those unfortunate human beings who are retarded or otherwise suffer from neurological or psychological trauma, we can generally state that every human being has all six characteristics of an intelligent entity, whether he/she be an Einstein or an aborigine. And it can be generally said that one can take any normal, average newborn human being from any place in the world and, with well-understood methods of training and education, turn that human being into a person who would meet every test of an "intelligent entity."

However, we or our progeny stand a very good chance of running headlong into the problem of recognizing an intelligent extraterrestrial entity when and if contact is ever made. It makes little difference whether we are the contactors or the contactees.

One of the major problems is: How do we act and how do we react toward an intelligent extraterrestrial being? How do we apply our rules and codes to the situation?

As a matter of fact, we could use an answer to that question with respect to interpersonal relationships and even international diplomacy between human beings whom we already know

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and recognize as being intelligent beings! How can we expect to make friendly and useful contact with an extraterrestrial intelligence if we cannot do the same among ourselves?

The human race is a singularly successful terrestrial species. It is also made up of individuals who are mean, nasty, vicious, deadly, covetous, greedy, deceitful, distrustful, and violent killers...of their own species. But our single most important invention may not lie in the province of our material technology, but in the increasingly sophisticated means that we have developed to keep from killing each other some of the time. In contrast to warriors who apply physical force, we have developed specialists in human conflict called "lawyers." These professional people of law not only codify, define, and write the laws under which we live, but they also interpret them and enforce them—using the services of warriors if the need arises.

However, we now have a welter of different—and often conflicting—sets of rules, regulations, codes, and laws under which we live. The rules differ from city to city, state to state, nation to nation, and even culture to culture. The Code Napoleon differs greatly from English Common Law, which in turn is quite different from the laws of Arabic countries or the nations of the orient. International law only scratches the surface in attempting to cross-connect between legal systems. And international law is also highly compartmented.

With all the different systems of law on Planet Earth, which one is optimized for use when Zork Aarrggh comes into the picture? Which code of conduct and action will be used to govern the relationships between Tommy Dort and the alien, "Buck"? Between Kip Russell and The Mother Thing? Or even between Shor Nun and Seun?

At first glance, it appears to boil down to two choices:

A. Kill!

B. Apply the Golden Rule.

The former is obviously wrong unless you are under direct attack from the extraterrestrial entity with no options for either negotiations or retreat.

But the latter is also wrong...very wrong! And perhaps as deadly as the first alternative mentioned!

The Golden Rule derives from a Judeo-Christian cultural ethic. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

When dealing with an extraterrestrial intelligent entity that perhaps has different biochemistry, genetic inheritance, and cultural bias, the Golden Rule could turn out to be the most deadly way to approach the problem! Something as simple as giving the alien a wiff of our twenty-one percent oxygen atmosphere at sea level pressure could kill him outright; he may come from a different atmosphere. Triple-distilled water could poison him. And even the "universal" human gesture of peace and good will, the upraised hand, could be understood to be a threat to

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strike with that very hand.

The Golden Rule won't work. As a matter of fact, it really doesn't work too well among human beings of different cultural backgrounds.

This was realized by the founder of the field of metalaw, Andrew Gallagher Haley (1904-1966). Haley was a Washington D.C attorney specializing in international law, especially that dealing with radio communications. When the great Hungarian-American fluid dynamics scientist, Dr. Theodore von Karman, needed somebody to set up a company to make the solid propellant rocket takeoff boosters for airplanes called JATO (Jet Assisted Take Off) that had been developed by Dr. von Karman and his associates at Cal Tech in 1942, he called upon Andy Haley who formed and became the first president of Aerojet Engineering Corporation. After the war, Haley went back to practicing law in Washington, but also became more deeply involved in astronautics. He became the president of the old American Rocket Society and was one of the founders of the International Astronautical Federation (IAF) in 1949. During one of the IAF meetings in Brussels, Belgium, Haley began discussing the sorts of things we are discussing here with Dr. Frank J. Malina, one of his former Aerojet JATO colleagues. Haley presented the first paper on metalaw at the 8th IAF Congress on September 19, 1956.

In this initial paper, Haley recognized the shortcoming of the Golden Rule. He replaced it with the First Principle of Metalaw, hereafter named Haley's Rule:

Do unto others as they would have you do unto them.

Haley's Rule may be one of the prime philosophical and ethical statements of the twentieth century. It is pregnant with implications. The more one thinks about Haley's Rule, the deeper one gets into one's own ethical outlook on the world. It is a loaded statement.

It is not only the *only* way to treat an extraterrestrial intelligent entity, but it is also the only way to treat other human beings.

If you are to do unto others as they would have you do unto them, it means that you are going to have to understand them and to empathize with them. It demands a respect for them as individuals and a respect for their cultural background.

And, yes, it is also the truth in the jocular statement, "A sadist is one who is kind to a masochist." But this very statement indicates that there must be some qualifiers to Haley's Rule. Obviously, there must be, because we called it the First Principle of Metalaw.

The other principles of Metalaw have their roots not only in classical philosophy and ethics, but in the thinking and writing of people such as Dr. Isaac Asimov, Dr. Jack Williamson, Lewis Padgett, and a host of other science fiction writers. You will find disturbing echoes of the Three Laws of Robotics here. You will find the echo of Gene Roddenberry's

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"Prime Directive" of *Star Trek*. And you will even find some of the principles set forth in historic documents such as the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America.

Robert A. Freitas, Jr. discussed some of the preceding material in a different manner in the April 1977 issue of Analog ("The Legal Rights of Extraterrestrials"). He calls the First Principle of Metalaw the Great Rule rather than Haley's Rule. In the tradition of scientific inquiry, permit me the idiosyncracy of naming the First Principle after the man who is responsible for it. Additional principles of Metalaw have been proposed by Dr. Ernst Fasan, an Austrian jurist, who lists eleven principles. Fasan's wording may have suffered in the translation; be that as it may, Fasan's principles are often ambiguous and somewhat slippery. At the risk of being compared with the hypothetical critic of Moses ("But can they remember all ten? Wouldn't it be better to start with a couple at a time?"), I have tried to wrap it all up in six general Principles of Metalaw. At one time, I believed there were seven, but I discovered that one was redundant. All six of them are presented together here because one must always consider them together as a system, which is what Metalaw is.

First Principle (Haley's Rule): Do unto others as they would have you do unto them.

Second Principle: The First Principle of Metalaw must not be followed if, by so doing, the destruction of an intelligent being would be the result.

Third Principle (Rule of Self Defense): Any intelligent being may suspend adherence to the first two Principles of Metalaw in his own self-defense to prevent other entities from restricting his freedom of choice.

Fourth Principle (Rule of Survival): An intelligent being must not affect the freedom of choice of another intelligent being and must not, by inaction, permit the destruction of another intelligent being.

Fifth Principle (Rule of Free Choice): Any intelligent being has the right to a free choice of living style, living location, and socio-economic-cultural system consistent with the principles of Metalaw.

Sixth Principle (Rule of Free Movement): Any intelligent being may move about at will in a fashion unrestricted by any other intelligent being provided he does not breach the Zone of Sensitivity of another intelligent being without permission of that being to do so.

To wrap this system up, a new definition is needed, and the definition itself probably needs additional massaging. The Zone of Sensitivity is another Metalaw concept. It is a volume of space about an intelligent being that extends out to the individual's thresholds of natural sensory detection *and* to the thresholds of his socio-economic-cultural system. This is probably yet imprecise, but perhaps we should leave something

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for the lawyers to argue. In any event, it is highly likely that *all* of the principles of Metalaw will cause controversy. At this point in time, this is healthy and necessary if we are to work out a useable, viable system. As Dr. Theodore von Karman once said, "How can we progress without controversy?"

The Principles of Metalaw are the principles of freedom because it is patently impossible to consider any system of law dealing with all frames of existence and with intelligent beings of all kinds without this structure of freedom. Is there any other way to treat Zork Aarrggh? If you treat him as the Spanish treated the Aztecs or the Incas, as the Europeans in general treated the Amerindians, or as colonials of all sorts have treated the indigenous natives throughout history, you may be in very big trouble. Zork may not be the noble savage, if that is the initial impression he presents; that strange device he holds may be a disintegrator, or a communicator that controls a planet-buster.

Human beings are going to have a tremendous amount of trouble learning to adhere to *any* of the Principles of Metalaw, let alone all six of them. For at least the last ten thousand years since the beginning of the Neolithic Age when people began living in villages, the human race has been following a widely variant code of ethics or rules of behavior. Every culture on Planet Earth today runs on the basis of this Neolithic Ethic that was first put into words by Dr. Carleton S. Coon, the anthropologist: "You stay in your village, and I will stay in mine. If your sheep or cattle come to eat our grass, we will kill you. However, if we want some of your grass for our sheep and cattle, we will come and get it. Anybody who makes us try to change our ways is a witch, and we will kill him. Stay out of our village!"

Since most of the world today operates with this Neolithic Ethic, knowledge of it helps one make some sense of international affairs, especially in the Middle East. The Neolithic Ethic was wildly successful because it did succeed; it permitted the stabilization of the village system that grew into the city government that became the nation-state. It was a viable defensive mechanism in a world where there wasn't enough to go around, a peasant economy where everyone had a little bit of everything but nobody really had very much of anything. It was a viable ethic when, if you wanted it, you had to take it from somebody who had it.

But the world has changed in the last two hundred years because of the development of technology and the industrial market system wherein if you don't have it, you make it instead of taking it.

Out of this new industrial market system is growing the capability for us to move at will around our own planet and out into space as well. The industrial life-style requires the "marketing concept" which states that one must produce what customers want to buy lest he go belly-up in bankruptcy

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in the competitive free market system or, in the centrally-directed economy, lest he end up with ten million butter churns that nobody wants because everybody already has two of them. The modern marketing concept of the industrial culture is totally in harmony with the Principles of Metalaw.

But aren't we now in a postindustrial culture? Perhaps parts of the United States, Canada, Western Europe, and Japan are getting there, but we are not really there yet. The world is still a long way from the postindustrial culture in spite of the pronouncements of Herman Kahn, William Irwin Thompson, and others. How can it be otherwise when nearly half the human race on this planet cannot read or write its own native language, let alone another language? How can we be in a postindustrial world when human beings are starving by the millions and still breeding by the millions while striving against incredible odds to become part of the new industrial culture? How can we possibly be in the postindustrial era when politicians, economists, and even some corporate managers continue to tinker with the new system using old concepts? How can we be postindustrial when we are just beginning to develop the codes of the industrial culture and when most of the world still operates on the Neolithic Ethic?

The Neolithic Ethic right now is holding us back in our development as a species, and it will have to be replaced as rapidly as possible with something like Metalaw.

Yes, there are inconsistencies within the Six Principles of Metalaw and the basic definitions that accompany them. It is yet an imperfect system because it is very new and very revolutionary to our traditional ways of thinking. These inconsistencies should not be reasons to hold back from giving them a try, because the legal profession will expand and evolve to handle the inconsistencies in Metalaw just as they do today in common law, corporate law, criminal law, and bureaucratic law, among others. There will always be individual cases to adjudicate in Metalaw, cases that hinge on the fine points of the inconsistencies in the rules and the interpretations of those rules. Metalawyers and Metalaw judges will evolve to make the rule interpretations and to judge each separate, individual case of inconsistency.

As seen through the eyes of the Metalawyer, the human race still has a very long way to go before the great change replaces the old Neolithic Ethic with something like Metalaw.

And we may very well not be given the opportunity to complete this evolutionary change before we are suddenly confronted by the fact that "we are not alone."

If the reports of close encounters of the third kind are true, it may well be that we have already been contacted but, because of our lack of an ethic such as Metalaw, we have been put on "hold" until we do come up with it. Put yourself in the shoes of an extraterrestrial with an ethic of Metalaw

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that controls his actions and relationships with his colleagues; under those conditions, would you want to bring the present members of the human race into your interstellar club?

If history is any reliable indicator of future trends, however, it is most likely that we will get caught with our ethics down. Contact is likely to happen before we develop a culture based on Metalaw. If this does happen, it may be a very expensive learning process for us.

And there are still problems of conflict even if we do possess the ethic of Metalaw. The failure of Metalaw to resolve conflicts in the interstellar arena (and even on our home world, to some extent) could result in one of two alternatives: (a) there would be open conflict known as war, the use of physical force to coerce and to resolve the conflict in the old, tried-and-true traditions of the hunter that still reside in each of us to a greater or lesser degree because they represent the tried-and-true survival instincts of millions of years of evolution, or (b) disengagement and/or mutual retreat to separate territories, perhaps following ritual combat just to show "we're not afraid to fight if we really have to," in a manner that many mammalian species on Planet Earth resolve their conflicts. However, the latter alternative implies a surplus of turf and an endless frontier, which, in turn, brings up an interesting speculation: If we had the final frontier of space in which to disengage in a conflict, would this lead to a lessening of warfare on Planet Earth?

We will not know whether the former or the latter alternative is going to be "the easy way out" that all life forms on Earth follow as a natural law until we learn how crowded the Universe is and how difficult it is to move around in it. If the Universe is empty of intelligent life forms except ourselves, we will be able to disengage ourselves from our own conflicts, and we will still need the new ethic of Metalaw just to improve the means with which we get along together. If the Universe is teeming with intelligent life forms, it's another story...and it's back to the Paleolithic of Planet Earth where the human race evolved in a world of scarcity, limited turf, and limited resources. We will be entering a Universe where others already exist... and we'd better have something like Metalaw for certain in that situation!

So, how do you act toward Zork Aarrggh of Beta Lycris A-3? You'd better have some sort of understanding of him first, particularly if you are the contactor. You'd better study him closely, study his culture carefully, and figure out what he would like done unto him. Otherwise, you stand a very good chance of making him very unhappy at the least. And, if he becomes unhappy, he may be meaner and hastier than you are when you are unhappy.

If, on the other hand, you are the contactee, you'd better hope that Zork Aarrggh knows and understands the Principles of Metalaw! ■

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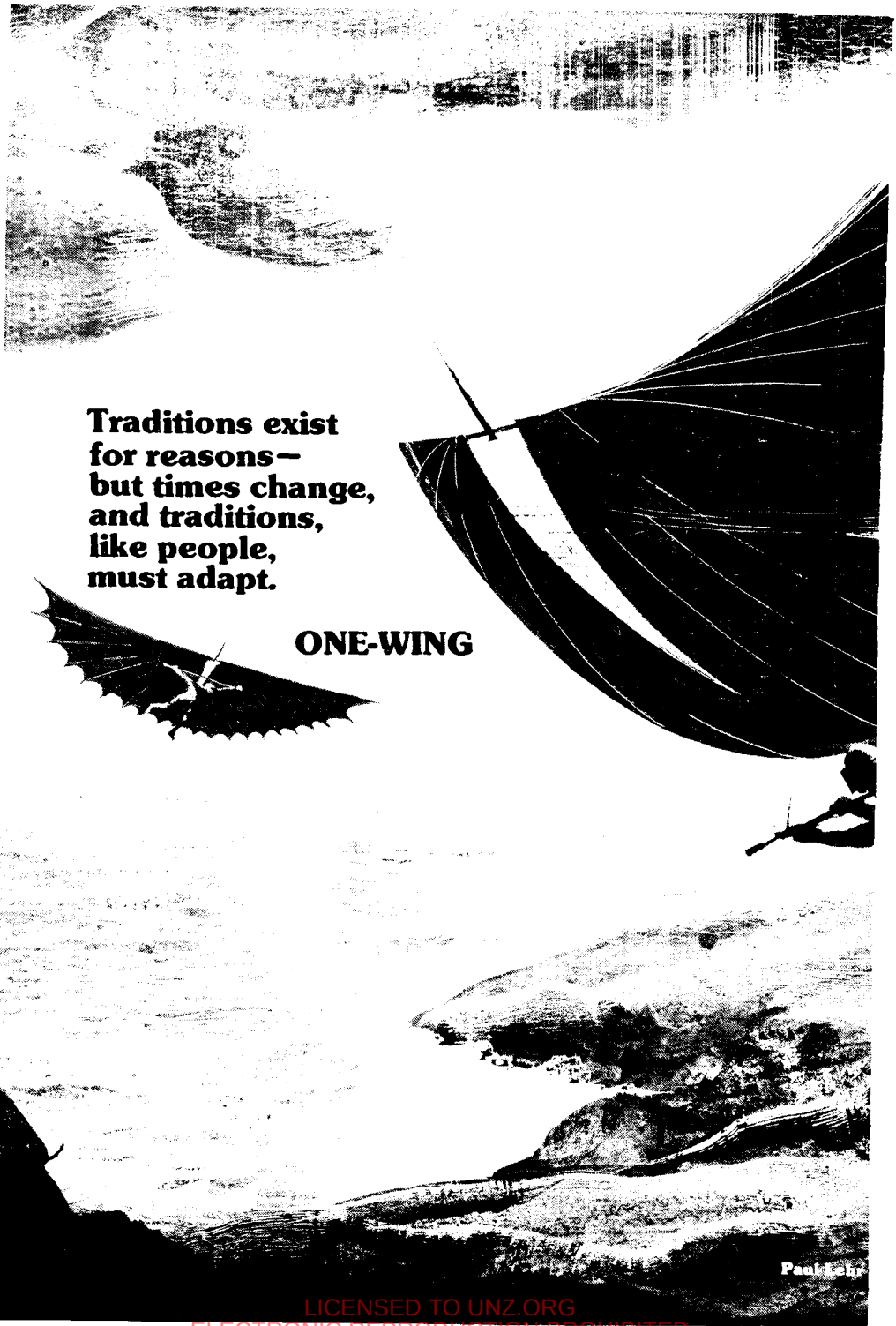

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SYNOPSIS

Wings are no longer passed down jealously from parent to child in the flyer families of Windhaven: for seven years there has been a system of annual competitions to determine who shall make use of the limited number of cloth-of-metal wings which are the most important method of travel and communication on this windy, ocean planet. Those who prove themselves best in a series of aerial contests are allowed to wear the wings, regardless of their age or background. Academies train those not born to a flyer's household and, theoretically, the sky is open to all. Yet in seven years, only once has a land-bound won a pair of wings—and he lost them during the following year's competition.

Tired of the drain on their purses, the Landsmen of Windhaven are closing down the academies they once enthusiastically supported. Now, only Woodwings Academy, on Seatooth, remains. The Landsman of Seatooth has supported it in the hope that a Woodwings-trained flyer would someday settle on Seatooth. But she has grown impatient, and has threatened to close Woodwings if there are no winners in the forthcoming competition.

Sena, the crippled flyer who runs Woodwings, has turned to Maris for help. Maris was the first land-bound to be accepted as a flyer and, in winning her own wings, she changed the structure of flyer society, and brought about the opening of the academies. She has been spending most of her time helping Sena train the young "woodwingers." Her flyer friends find the time she spends helping land-bound hopefuls achieve flyer status disturbing, and Maris often feels torn by conflicting demands.

A new student, Val, makes the hazardous ocean voyage to Woodwings, and Sena announces her intention of sponsoring Val at the competition, along with her most promising students, S'Rella, Sher, Leya, Damen and Kerr. She asks Maris to help her ready them.

But Maris has discovered that Val—an arrogant, unpleasant young man—is the one the flyers have contemptuously dubbed "One-Wing." Flyers unanimously despise Val for the way in which he won a pair of wings, several years before, and Maris holds him personally responsible for the death of a friend of hers.

As a boy, Val had challenged a young woman named Ari. Grieving over the recent death of her brother, Ari had flown badly, and lost her wings to Val. A month later, Ari killed herself. Val had never made any apology, or shown any pity, for the flyer he defeated, and in the following year's competition, the flyers had ganged up to challenge Val until he lost the wings again. (Subsequently, multiple challenges have been prohibited by flyer law.)

Maris wants nothing to do with Val One-Wing. Sena argues that Val is the best flyer among all the woodwingers, the one with the best chance of winning wings. His performance might

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make the difference of whether or not Woodwings will remain open—the flyers might despise him, but the Landsman of Seatooth would welcome him as her island's flyer. Forced to admit that Val is a very good flyer, but still in emotional conflict, Maris finally agrees to offer Val her advice—if the remote young man will take it—and do what she can to help him, as well as the other woodwingers, prepare for the competition.

Val alienates almost everyone with his rude manner and deliberate flaunting of flyer tradition—he even goes so far as to wear his obsidian knife (a legacy, he says, from his father) into the air. Only S'Rella befriends Val, and she is drawn to him in a way that worries Maris.

Maris learns that Val has no intention of becoming a flyer—not, at least, as she and her friends mean the word. He is interested only in obtaining a pair of wings, which he sees as his passport to a better life, to a life of relative wealth, ease and respect. He has no use for tradition, or for the friendship of other flyers. Maris realizes that Val may be the first of a new breed and that, like them or not, the old flyers will have to make room for them.

In an argument with Dorrel, her old friend and lover, Maris tries to explain her feelings about Val, and others like him. "We can't turn our backs on them. The world has changed, and we have to accept it, and deal with it. We may not like all the results of what we've done, but we can't deny them. Val is one of those results."

Maris and S'Rella spent the night together in a roughly finished cabin for two not far from the shore, one of fifty such structures that the Landsman of Skulny had caused to be erected to house the visiting flyers. The little village was only half full as yet, but Maris knew that the earliest arrivals had already appropriated the more comfortable accommodations in the lodge house and the guest wing of the Landsman's own High Hall.

S'Rella didn't mind the austerity of their lodgings. She was in high spirits when Maris retrieved her at last from the dying party. Garth had stayed close to her throughout the evening, introducing her to most everybody, forcing her to eat three portions of his stew after she had praised it incautiously, and regaling her with embarrassing anecdotes about half of the flyers present. "He's nice," S'Rella said, "but he drinks too much." Maris could only agree with that, though it had not always been so; when she'd come to find S'Rella, Garth had been red-eyed and close to staggering. Maris helped him to the back room and put him to bed while he carried on a slurred, unintelligible conversation.

The next day dawned grey and windy. They woke to the cries of a food vendor, and Maris slipped outside and bought two steaming hot sausages from his cart. After breakfast, they donned their wings and flew. Not many of the flyers were in the air; the

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holiday atmosphere was a contagion, and most were drinking and talking in the lodge, or paying their respects to the Landsman, or wandering about Skulny to see what there was to see. But Maris insisted that S'Rella practice, and they stayed aloft for close to five hours on steadily rising winds.

Below them, the beach was again choked with children eager to assist incoming flyers. Despite their numbers, they were kept busy. Arrivals were constant throughout the day. The most spectacular moment—S'Rella looked on with wondering, awe-struck eyes—was when the flyers of Big Shotan approached en masse, nearly forty strong, flying in a tight formation, gorgeous against the sun in their dark red uniforms and shimmering silver wings.

By the time the competition began, Maris knew, virtually all the flyers from the scattered reaches of Western would be here, since the games were close at hand this year. Eastern would be heavily represented too, although not quite with the unanimity of Western. Southern, smaller and further, would have fewer still, and there would be only a handful of competitors from the Outer Islands, desolate Artellia, the volcanic Embers, and the other far-off places.

It was afternoon, and Maris and S'Rella were sitting outside the lodge with glasses of hot spiced milk in their hands, when Val made his appearance.

He gave Maris his mocking half-smile and sat down next to S'Rella. "I trust you enjoyed flyer hospitality," he said flatly.

"They were nice," S'Rella said, blushing. "Won't you come tonight? There's to be another party. Garth is going to roast a whole seacat, and his sister is providing ale."

"No," Val said. "They have ale enough and food enough where I'm staying, and it suits me better." He glanced at Maris. "No doubt it suits us all better."

Maris refused to be baited. "Where *are* you staying?"

"A tavern about two miles down the sea road. Not the sort of place you'd care to visit. They don't get many flyers there, just miners and landsguard and some who are more reticent to talk about their professions. I doubt they'd know how to treat a flyer properly."

Maris frowned in annoyance. "Do you ever stop?"

"Stop?" He smiled.

All at once Maris was filled with a perverse determination to erase that smile, to prove Val wrong. "You don't even know the flyers," she said angrily. "What right have you to hate them so? They're people, no different than you--no, that's wrong, they are different. They're warmer and more generous."

"The warmth and generosity of flyers is fabled," Val said. "No doubt that's why only flyers are welcome at flyer parties."

"They welcomed *me*," S'Rella said. Her voice was firm yet quiet.

Val gave her a long look, cautious and measuring. Then he shrugged and

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the thin smile returned to his lips. "You've convinced me," he said. "I'll come to this party tonight, if they'll let a land-bound in the door."

"Come as my guest, then," Maris said. "If you refuse to call yourself a flyer. And try to put aside your damned hostility for a few hours. Give them a chance."

"Please," S'Rella said. She took his hand and smiled hopefully at him.

"Oh, they'll have a chance to show their warmth and generosity," Val said. "But I won't beg for it, or polish their wings, or sing songs in their praise." He stood up abruptly. "Now, I would like to get some flying in. Is there a pair of wings I might be able to use?"

Maris nodded and directed him to the cabin where his wings were hung. After he was gone, she turned to S'Rella. "You care for him a lot, don't you?" she said softly.

S'Rella lowered her eyes and blushed. "I know he's cruel at times, Maris, but he's not always like that."

"Maybe that's so," Maris admitted. "He hasn't let me get to know him very well. Just—just be careful, all right, S'Rella? Val has a lot of hurt in him and sometimes people like that, when they've been hurt, get back by hurting others, even those who care for them and haven't hurt them at all."

"I know," S'Rella said. "Maris, you don't think—they won't hurt him tonight, will they? The flyers?"

"I think he wants them to," Maris said. "So you'll see that he's right about them—about us. But I'm hoping that we'll prove him wrong."

S'Rella said nothing. Maris finished her drink and rose. "Come," she said. "The party will take care of itself. There's still time for more practice, and you need it. Let's get our wings back on."

By early evening it was common knowledge among the flyers that Val One-Wing was on Skulny and intended to challenge. How the word had gotten out Maris was unsure. Perhaps Dorrel had said something, or perhaps Val had been recognized, or perhaps the news had come in from Eastern with some flyer who knew that Val had taken ship from Airhome. It was out and flying in any case. Twice Maris heard the epithet "One-Wing" as she and S'Rella walked back to their cabin in the flyer village, and outside their door a young flyer Maris knew casually from the Eyrie stopped her and asked her point-blank if the rumor was true. When Maris admitted that it was, the other woman just whistled and shook her head.

It was not quite dark when Maris and S'Rella wandered up to the lodge, but the main room was already half-full of flyers, drinking and talking in small clusters. The promised seacat was roasting on a spit above the fire, but by the look of it still had several hours to go.

Garth's sister, a stout plain-faced woman named Riesa, drew Maris a mug of her ale from one of three huge wooden casks that had been set along one wall. "It's good," Maris said

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after tasting. "Although I confess I'm no expert. Wine and *kivas* are my usual drinks."

Riesa laughed. "Well, Garth swears by it, and he's drunk enough ale in his time to float a small trading fleet."

"Where is Garth?" S'Rella asked. "I thought he'd be here."

"He should be, later," Riesa said. "He wasn't feeling well, so he sent me on ahead. I think it was just an excuse to avoid helping with the barrels."

"Wasn't feeling well?" Maris said. "Riesa, is everything all right? He's been ill frequently of late, hasn't he?"

Riesa's pleasant smile faded. "Has he told you, Maris? I wasn't sure. It's only been the past half-year. It's his joints. When it gets bad, they swell up on him something terrible, and even when they aren't swelling he's got pain." She leaned a little closer. "I'm worried about him in truth. Dorrel is too. He's seen healers, here and in Stormtown too, but no one has been able to do much. And he's drinking more than he used to."

Maris was appalled. "I knew Dorrel was fretting over him, but I thought it was just his drinking." She hesitated. "Riesa, has Garth told the Landsman about his troubles?"

Riesa shook her head. "No, he's—" She interrupted herself to draw a mug for a craggy-looking Easterner strange to Maris, and resumed only after he had drifted away. "He's afraid, Maris, I am certain of it."

"Why is he afraid?" S'Rella asked quietly, looking from Maris to Riesa and back again. She had been standing silently by Maris' elbow, listening to everything that was said.

"If a flyer is sick," Maris said, "the Landsman can call together the island's other flyers, and if they agree can take the wings from the sick one, lest they be lost at sea." She looked back towards Riesa. "Then Garth is still flying missions as if he were well," she said, with concern in her voice. "The Landsman isn't sparing him."

"No," Riesa said, chewing on her lip. "I'm frightened for him, Maris. The pain comes on so suddenly sometimes, and if it should come while he's flying—I've told him to speak to the Landsman, but he won't hear of it. His wings are everything to him, you know that. All you flyers are alike."

"I'll talk to him," Maris said firmly.

"Dorrel has spoken to him endlessly," Riesa said. "It does no good. You know how stubborn Garth can be."

"He should lay down his wings," S'Rella blurted suddenly.

Riesa gave her a hard look. "Child, you don't know what you are saying. You are the woodwinger Garth met last night, are you not? Maris' friend?"

S'Rella nodded.

"Yes, Garth spoke of you," Riesa said. "You would understand better if you were a flyer. You and I, we can only watch from outside, we can never feel as a flyer feels about his wings. At least Garth has told me so."

"I *will* be a flyer," S'Rella insisted.

"Certainly you will, child," Riesa said, "but you are not now, and that is why you talk so easily of laying down the wings."

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But S'Rella looked offended. She stood very stiffly and said, "I'm not a child, and I *do* understand." She might have said more, but just then the door opened and closed, and she and Maris both glanced in that direction.

Val had arrived.

"Excuse me," Maris said, taking Riesa by the forearm and giving her a squeeze for reassurance. "We'll talk more later." She hurried to where Val stood, his dark eyes sweeping the room, one hand resting on the hilt of his ornate knife in a pose that was half nervousness and half challenge.

"A small party," he said noncommittally when Maris and S'Rella joined him.

"It's early," Maris replied. "Give it time. Come, let's get you a drink and a bit of food." She gestured to the far wall, where a lavish table had once again been spread; spiced eggs, fruit, four kinds of cheese, bread, various kinds of small shellfish, sweetmeats, pastries. "The seacat is the main course, but we'll be waiting hours for that," she concluded.

Val took in the seacat on the spit and the table covered with other edibles. "I see the flyers are eating simply once again," he said. But he followed Maris and S'Rella across the room, where he ate two spiced eggs and a wedge of cheese before pausing to pouring a goblet of wine.

Around them the party went on as ever; Val had attracted no particular attention. But Maris had no way of knowing if that was because the others had accepted him, or simply failed to recognize him; most of the flyers present were either strangers or nodding acquaintances whose names escaped her. So the three of them stood quietly for a few moments, S'Rella talking to Val in a low voice while he sipped at his wine and nibbled some more cheese, Maris quaffing her ale and watching the front door a bit apprehensively each time it

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opened. It had grown dark outside, and the lodge was filling up rapidly. A dozen Shotaners she knew only vaguely swept in all at once, still in their red uniforms, followed by a half-dozen Easterners she knew not at all. One of them climbed atop Riesa's ale casks, and a companion tossed him up a guitar, and he began to sing flyers' songs in a passably mellow voice. Beneath him the crowd grew dense with some standing and listening and shouting up requests, and others sampling Riesa's ale.

Maris, still glancing at the door whenever it opened, drifted a bit closer to Val and S'Rella, and tried to listen to them above the music.

Then the music stopped.

In mid-song, suddenly singer and guitar both grew silent, and the silence flowed across the room, as conversations ceased and all eyes turned curiously to the man perched atop the ale keg, a slim, balding Easterner who all at once seemed to have lost his voice. In less than a minute, everyone in the lodge was looking at him.

And he was looking across the room at Val.

Val turned in his direction and raised his wine glass. "Greetings, Loren," he called, in his maddeningly flat tones. "I toast your *fine* singing." He drained his wine and set the glass aside.

Someone, taking Val's words for veiled insult, snickered. Others took the toast in earnest, and raised their own glasses. The singer just sat and stared, his face darkening, and most of the flyers watched him, baffled, waiting for him to resume his music.

"Do the ballad of Aron and Jeni," someone called out.

The guitarist shook his head. "No," he said, smiling, "I've got a more appropriate song." He played a few opening bars and began to sing a song unfamiliar to Maris.

Val turned to her. "Don't you recognize it?" he said. "It's popular in Eastern. They call it the ballad of Ari and One-Wing." He poured himself more wine and raised the glass again in mocking tribute to the singer.

With a sinking feeling, Maris realized that she *had* heard the song before, years past, and what was worse had probably enjoyed it. It was a rousing, dramatic story of betrayal and revenge, with One-Wing the villian and the flyers the heroes.

S'Rella was biting her lip in anger, barely holding back her tears. She started forward impulsively, but Val restrained her with a hand on her arm and shook his head. Maris could only stand helplessly, listening to the cruel words, so very different from those of her own song, the one Coll had written for her. She wished he were here now, to compose a song in answer to this. Singers had a strange power, even amateurs like the Easterner.

When he was finished, everyone knew.

He tossed his guitar down to a friend, and jumped down after it. "I'll be singing on the beach, if anyone cares to hear," he said. Then he took his instrument and left, followed by all of the Easterners who had arrived with him

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and a good many others. The lodge was suddenly half-empty again.

"Loren was a neighbor," Val said. "From North Arren, just across the bay. I haven't seen him in years."

The Shotaners were talking softly among themselves, one or two of them giving Val, Maris and S'Rella pointed looks from time to time. All of them left together.

"You haven't introduced me to your flyer friends," Val said to S'Rella. "Come." He took her hand and led her forcefully to where four men were clustered in a tight circle. Maris had no choice but to follow. "I'm Val of South Arren," he said loudly. "This is S'Rella. Fine flying weather today, wasn't it?"

One of the four, a huge dark man with a massive jaw, frowned at him. "I admire your courage, One-Wing," he rumbled, "but nothing else about you. I knew Ari, though not well. Do you want me to make polite conversation with you?"

"This is a flyers' lodge and a flyers' party," his companion said sharply. "Do you two have business here?"

"They are *my* guests," Maris said furiously. "Or do you question my right to be here too?"

"No. Only your taste in guests." He clapped the big man on the shoulder. "Come. I have a sudden urge to hear some singing."

Val tried another group, two women and a man with ale mugs in their hands. Before he had quite reached them, they set down their mugs—still half-full—and left.

Only one party remained in the room, six flyers that Maris knew vaguely from the far reaches of Western, and a single blond youth from the Outer Islands. And suddenly they were leaving too, but on the way to the door one of them, a man well into his middle years, stopped to talk to Val. "You may not remember, but I was among the judges the year you took Ari's wings," the man said. "We judged fairly, but some have never forgiven us for the verdict we handed down. Perhaps you did not know what you were doing, perhaps you did. It makes no difference. If they were so reluctant to forgive me, they will never forgive *you*. I pity you, but we're helpless. You were wrong to come back, son. They will never let you be a flyer."

Val had been calm through everything else, but now his face contorted in rage. "I do not want your pity," he said. "I do not want to be one of you. *And I am not your son!* Get out of here, old man, or I will take *your* wings this year."

The grey-haired flyer shook his head, and a companion took him by his elbow. "Let's go, Cadon. You waste your concern on him."

When they left, only Riesa remained in the lodge room with Maris, Val, and S'Rella. She busied herself with her ale mugs, gathering them up to wash, and did not look at them.

"Warmth and generosity," Val said.

"They're not all—" Maris started, and found she could not go on. S'Rella looked as if she were about to cry.

Then the door crashed open, and it

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was Garth standing there, frowning, looking puzzled and angry. "What is going on?" he said. "I stumble up from home to host my party, and everyone is out on the beach. Maris? Riesa?" He slammed the door and started across the room. "If there was a fight, I'll break the neck of the fool who started it. Flyers have no business quarrelling like land-bound."

Val faced him squarely. "I'm the cause of your empty party," he said.

"Do I know you?" Garth said.

"Val. Of South Arren." He waited.

"He didn't start anything," Maris said suddenly. "Believe that, Garth. He's my guest."

Garth looked baffled. "Then why—?"

"I'm also called One-Wing."

Comprehension broke across Garth's face, and Maris knew how she must have looked the day she had met Val on the Stormtown docks, and had a sickening realization of what it must have felt like to Val.

Whatever Garth felt, he struggled to control it. "I wish I could bid you welcome," he said, "but that would be a lie. Ari was a sweet fine woman who never hurt anyone, and I knew her brother too. We all did." He sighed and looked to Maris. "He is your guest, you say? What would you have me do with him?"

"Ari was my friend as well," Maris said. "Garth, I don't ask you to forget her. But Val is not her killer. He took her wings, not her life."

"They are one and the same," Garth grumbled, but it was half-hearted. He looked back at Val. "You were a boy then, though, and none of us knew that Ari would kill herself. I've made my own share of mistakes, though none as big as yours, and I suppose—"

"I made no mistake," Val interjected quickly. His dark eyes flashed.

Garth blinked. "Your challenge was a mistake," he said. "Ari killed herself because of it."

"I would challenge her again," Val said. "She was not fit to fly. Her death was *her* mistake, not mine."

Garth was always gentle and genial, even his infrequent angers full of bluff and bluster; Maris had never seen his face as cold and bitter as it looked now. "Out, One-Wing," he said, his voice low. "Leave this lodge and do not enter it again, whether you wear wings or not. I will not have you."

"I won't be back," Val said evenly. "Nonetheless, I thank you for your warmth and generosity." He smiled and headed towards the door. S'Rella started after him.

"S'Rella," Garth said. "I don't—you can stay, girl, I have no—"

S'Rella whirled. "Everything Val says is true. I hate you all." And she followed Val One-Wing out into night.

S'Rella did not return to their little cabin that night, but she was there just after dawn the next day, Val with her, both ready for practice. Maris gave them the wings and accompanied them up the steep, twisting stone stairs to flyers' cliff. "Race," she told them. "Fly above the coastline, using the seabreeze and staying low. Circle the

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entire island." In silence, they left.

It was not until they were out of sight that Maris took wing herself. They would take several hours to complete the circuit, and she was thankful for the time. She felt tired and irritable, in no mood for even the best of company, and Val was never that. She gave herself to the healing embrace of the wind and angled out to sea.

The morning was pale and quiet, the wind steady behind her. She rode it, letting it take her where it would; all directions were the same to her. She wanted only to fly, to feel the touch of the wind, to forget all the petty troubles below in the cold air of the upper sky.

There was little enough to see; gulls and scavenger-kites and a hawk or two near the shores of Skulny, a fishing boat here and there, and further out only ocean, ocean everywhere, blue-green water with long bright streaks of sun upon it. Once she saw a pack of seacats, graceful silver shapes whose playful leaps took them twenty feet above the waves. An hour later, she caught a rare glimpse of a wind wraith, a vast strange bird with semi-translucent wings as wide and thin as the sails of a trading ship. Maris had never seen one before, though she had heard other flyers speak of them. They liked the higher altitudes where humans seldom flew, and almost never came within sight of land. This one was quite low, floating on the wind, its great wings scarcely seeming to move. She soon lost sight of it.

A deep sense of peace filled her, and she felt all the tensions and angers of the land drain away from her. *This* was what it meant to fly, she thought. The rest, the messages she flew, the honor paid to her, the ease of living, the friends and enemies in flyer society, the rules and laws and legends, the responsibility and the boundless freedom, all of it, all of it was secondary. This, for her, was the real reward; the simple feel of flying.

S'Rella felt it too, she thought. Perhaps that was why she was so drawn to the Southern girl, because of the way she looked when she came from flying, cheeks flushed, eyes glowing, smiling. Val had none of that look about him, Maris realized suddenly. The thought saddened her. Even if he should win his wings, he would miss so much; he took a fierce pride in his flying, came away from it with a sheen of satisfaction, but he was not capable of finding joy in the sky. Whether or not he ever won his wings, the peace and happiness of the true flyer would always be denied him. And that, thought Maris, was the cruelest truth about Val's life.

When she saw by the sun that it was nearly noon, Maris finally banked and swept around in a long, graceful arc to begin the flight back to Skulny.

Maris was resting in her cabin late that afternoon—Val and S'Rella had hung up their wings for the day and gone off down the road to the tavern where Val was staying in search of dinner—when she was startled by loud, insistent pounding on her door.

Her visitor was a stranger, a short, slight, hollow-cheeked man with grey-

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ing hair pulled back hard and tied in a knot in the back of his head. An Easterner; his hair style gave him away, as did his clothes, collar and cuffs trimmed with black fur, shirt hooded. He wore an iron ring on one finger and silver on the next, testimonials to his wealth and status. "I would speak to you," he said brusquely when Maris opened the door.

"Do I know you?" Maris said.

"My name is Arak," he said. "I have flown for South Arren for these past thirty years."

Maris opened the door wider and let him in, gesturing him towards the only chair in the cabin. She sat on a bed. "You are from Val's home island."

"I have that misfortune," he said.

She did not care for his tone. "Well?" she demanded.

"Some of us have been talking—"

"Us?"

"The flyers," he said.

"Which flyers, precisely?"

"It doesn't matter who they were," Arak said. There was something about the man, his self-centered intensity, that woke all of Maris' hostilities. "Some of them think you are a flyer at heart, even though you were not flyer-born. So I was sent to talk to you, to tell you about Val One-Wing and dissuade you from helping him."

"I doubt that you could tell me anything that would change my course," Maris said.

"You do not know what sort of man he is" the Easterner said sharply.

"No? I remember Ari. I have lived with Val's bitterness these past few weeks. He still deserves his chance."

"His chance," Arak said angrily. "He has had chances enough, more than he ever deserved. Do you know about his parents?"

Maris shrugged. "Land-bound, as were my own."

"Worse than land-bound," Arak said. "Vicious, dirty, ignorant. He was born on Lomarron, did you know that? Not on South Arren at all. Do you know Lomarron?"

Maris nodded, suddenly interested despite herself. She had flown to Lomarron once, three or four years ago, but that had been enough. A large, desolate island, all rocks and mountains, the soil too poor for farming, but rich in the metals so rare on Windhaven. Almost all the land-bound on Lomarron worked in the mines, and with such wealth at hand, warfare was endemic. "They were miners," she guessed.

But Arak shook his head. "Landsguard," he said. "Professional killers. His father was a knife-fighter, his mother a sling."

"Many islands have landsguard forces," Maris said uneasily.

Arak seemed to be enjoying this. "On Lomarron they get more practice than on other islands," he said. "Too much, finally. His mother had her sling hand lopped off in an engagement, severed clean at the wrist. Not long after that there was a truce. But Val's family didn't take to truces. His father killed a man anyway, and then the three of them had to flee Lomarron in a fishing boat they stole. That was how they came to South Arren. The mother

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was a useless one-handed cripple, but the father joined the landsguard again. Only for a short time, though. One night he got too drunk and told a mate who he was, and word reached the *Landsman, and then Lomarron.* He was hanged as a thief and a murderer."

Maris sat numbed, not knowing what to say.

"I know all this," Arak went on, "because I took pity on the poor widow. My wife had died not long before, so I took her in as a housekeeper and cook, never mind that she had only one hand and couldn't do half as much work as a healthy one. I gave them a place to live, work, decent enough food, raised Val with my own son. But kindness couldn't change him or his mother. It was wasted on them, and anything you do for him is going to be wasted as well. His mother was lazy and shiftless, always whining and complaining about how she felt, never getting her work done on time, but expecting to be paid for it all the same. Val was insolent. I tried to straighten him out, gave him a taste of discipline, but it was useless. The blood was bad. He used to play at being a knife-fighter, you know, and killing people. Even tried to drag my own boy into his sick games, but I stopped that soon enough. He was a terrible influence. Both of them stole, you know, him and his mother. There was always something missing. I had to keep my iron under lock and key. I even caught him handling my wings once, in the middle of the night, when he thought I was asleep.

"He hasn't changed since, either. Give him the chance to get into an academy, and what did he do with it—killed someone right off, anything to get what he wanted. I'd wager he committed other crimes during the year he *had those wings, too. We just don't* know about them. Lots of things a flyer can do if he cares to."

Maris stood up. She was remembering things Val had said back at Woodwings. She was remembering the scars on his back. And she remembered her own childhood as well, and the flyer Russ who had adopted her and raised her as his own. Her lips trembled.

"Discipline, you say," she said, keeping her voice as flat as she could manage. "What kind of discipline?"

"Eh?" Arak looked at her in surprise, the thread of his speech broken. He was a small man, and seated, and Maris loomed over him as she stood with her arms folded. "Nothing excessive," he said. "A blackwood stick when he was little, a lick of the whip now and again when he'd grown. The same as I gave my own."

"The same as your own," she repeated. "And did they eat at a table with you? Share the food you ate?"

Arak stood up, his sharp face twisted in dismay. But even standing he had to look up to her. "Of course not," he snapped. "They were help, hired landbound. They had food, though. I didn't starve them."

"Scraps," Maris spat angrily. "Scraps from your own table. Rotten fish you didn't want anymore."

"I was flying when you were a landbound brat playing with seashells,"

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Arak said. "Keep your insolence to yourself. How I feed my household is my business."

"And did he ever ask you to teach him the wings?" Maris said, ignoring his comment. She stepped closer to him. "When you were training your own son, did Val ever want to fly too?"

Arak laughed, a choking snort of laughter. "I whipped that idea out of him fast enough," he said. "That was before you came along with your damned academies, and put notions in all these land-bound heads."

She shoved him.

She had never done anything like it before, never touched another person in anger, but now she shoved him, hard, with both hands, and Arak staggered backwards and his laughter died in his throat. And Maris came forward and shoved him again, and he stumbled and went down, disbelief and the beginnings of fear in his eyes. She stood over him. "Get up," she said. "Get up and get out, you filthy little man. If I could I'd rip the wings from your back. You foul the sky."

Arak rose and moved quickly to the door, a frightened shuffle before Maris could touch him again. But outdoors he got his courage back. "I knew this idea was a folly," he said. "I told them as much. Land-bound is land-bound. The blood will tell. I voted against your academies, you know. We should have taken your wings when we had the chance. Maybe we'll take them yet."

Maris, shaking, slammed the door on him.

But no sooner had she done it then a terrible suspicion hit her, and she threw open the door and went after him. Arak saw her coming and tried to run, but she caught him on the edge of the small village and knocked him flat on the sand. Several astonished flyers watched, but no one moved to interfere. Arak cringed beneath her with an arm across his face. "Get away from me!" he shouted.

"Where was Val's father executed?" Maris demanded. "On Lomarron or South Arren? *Where*?"

"Leave me alone," Arak said. He got clumsily to his feet.

"Where?"

"On Arren, of course, on Arren. No sense shipping him back. Our rope was just as good." He stepped backwards, away from her.

"But the crime was committed on Lomarron, so the Landsman of Lomarron had to order the execution," Maris said. "How did that order get to your Landsman? You flew it, didn't you? *You flew the messages both ways*!"

Arak glared at her and broke and ran again. Maris did not go after him.

The look on his face had been all the admission she needed.

The tavern was a shabby place, its interior dark and cold and smelling faintly of mold. The fire was too small to heat the main room properly, and the candles on the table burned smokily. Val was dicing with three dark-haired, heavy women in landsguard brown-and-green, but he came away when Maris asked him, a wine glass clapsed

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loosely in his hand.

He nursed his wine as she spoke, his face closed and silent. When she had finished, his smile was faint and fast-fading. "Warmth and generosity," he said. "Arak has them both in abundance." After that he said nothing.

The silence was lengthy and awkward. "Is that all you're going to say?" Maris asked finally.

Val's expression changed just a little, the lines around his mouth tightening, eyes narrowing; he looked harder than ever. "What did you expect me to say, flyer? Did you think I'd embrace you, bed you, sing a song in praise of your understanding? What?"

Maris was startled by the anger in his tone. "I—I don't know what I expected," she said. "But I wanted to let you know that I understood what you'd been through, that I was on your side."

"I don't want you on my side," Val said. "I don't *need* you, or your sympathy. And if you think I appreciate your prying into my past, you are wrong. What went on between Arak and myself is our business, not yours, and neither of us needs your judgments." He finished his wine, snapped his fingers, and the barkeep came across the room and set a bottle on the table between them.

"You wanted revenge on Arak, and rightly so," Maris said stubbornly, "but you've changed that into a desire for revenge against *all* flyers. You should have challenged Arak, not Ari."

Val poured himself a refill and tasted it. His face was still angry, but his tone cooled a little, as if he were abashed for losing control even slightly. "There are several problems with that romantic notion," he said. "For one, Arak did not have wings when Airhome finally sponsored me in challenge. His son had come of age and assumed them the previous year. Arak was retired. But two years ago, the son picked up something down in Southern, some disease that racked him with fever and made him stink and grow fungus all over his body. After he died of it, Arak took up the wings again."

"I see," Maris said. "And you didn't challenge the son because he was a friend."

Val's laugh was cruel. "Hardly. The son was an ill-bred bully who grew more like his father every day. I didn't shed a tear when they dropped him into the sea. Oh, we played together once, when he was still too young to quite comprehend how superior he was, and we were whipped together often enough, but there was no bond between us." He leaned forward. "I didn't challenge the son because he was good, the same reason I would not have challenged Arak. I was not interested in revenge. I was interested in wings, and the things that went with them. Your Ari was the feeblest flyer I saw, and I knew I could take her wings. Against Arak or his son I would have lost. It is that simple."

He sipped at his wine again, while Maris watched with something close to dismay. Whatever she had hoped to accomplish by coming here, whatever bond she had hoped to forge, was not happening. And she realized that it

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would not happen, *could* not happen. She had been foolish to think otherwise. Val One-Wing was who he was, and that would not change simply because Maris understood the cruel forces that had shaped him. He sat regarding her with the same cool disdain as ever, and she knew then that they could never be friends, never, no matter what might come to pass.

But she tried a final time to soften him. "Don't judge all flyers by Arak," she began. As she heard her own words, she wondered why she had *not* said *us,* why she spoke of the flyers as if she were not one of them. She had been doing that a lot lately. "Arak is not typical, Val."

"Arak and I understand each other well enough," Val said. "I know exactly what he is, thank you. I know that he is crueler than most, flyer or landbound, and less intelligent, and more easily angered. That does not make my opinions of flyers any less true. His attitudes are shared by most of your friends, whether you care to admit it or not. Arak is only a bit less reticent about voicing those views, and a little more crude in the way he does so."

Maris rose. "We have nothing more to say to each other," she said coolly. I'll expect you and S'Rella tomorrow morning for practice."

Sena and the other woodwingers arrived several hours ahead of schedule on the day before the competition was to open, putting in at the nearest port and trekking twelve miles overland along the sea road. Maris had not been expecting them. She was up flying, and she did not know they had arrived until they had been in the flyer village several hours and were already settled comfortably into cabins.

When she found them, Sena almost immediately asked after the academy wings, and sent Sher and Leya off to fetch them from Maris' cabin. "Val and S'Rella are no doubt limber enough by now," she said. "But the rest of us have been at sea, and we must take advantage of every hour of good flying wind."

Only when the students had gone off to fly for the rest of the afternoon did Sena beckon Maris to take a seat. "Tell me what is wrong," she said.

"What—"

Sena gestured impatiently with her cane. "I noticed it at once," she said. "Don't take me for an old fool. In years past, we've never been fully accepted by the flyers, but they were always polite enough. Cool, yes, and patronizing, endlessly. But this year the hostility is rank. I could smell it as soon as we arrived, and the students have noticed it too, although some of them aren't sure what it is. Is it Val?"

Maris told her about the party at the lodge, about her conversation with Dorrel, a little about Arak and his visit.

Sena was frowning when she finished. "Well, it is unfortunate," she said. "But Val has survived worse for years, so we can survive the little that rubs off on us. Adversity will toughen them. They need that."

"Do they?" Maris said, bitterness creeping into her tone. "This is not the

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kind of toughness you get from the wind and the weather and a hard landing or two. This is something else, a hardness of the spirit. Do they need their hearts toughened as well as their bodies?"

Sena placed a hand on her shoulder. "These days, I think they do. Easy, Maris. I understand your disappointment. I too was a flyer, and I would have liked to believe better of my old friends. I am disappointed too, but it is not the end of everything."

That night they bought food from the vendors and ate it in their cabins, while the flyers enjoyed a final boisterous party at the lodge. Even in the village Maris could hear the noise, but Sena would hear no talk of going up to it; she insisted her charges retire early. But before that, she gathered them together—even Val—for one final meeting in her cabin.

She began by going over the rules, which changed enough from year to year so that even those who had challenged before needed a refresher. The competition was to last three days, but the serious business, the formal challenges, would be restricted to the mornings. "Tomorrow you name your opponent, and race, the test for speed and endurance," Sena said. "The day after, the judges look for grace. On the third day, precision; you fly the gates to show the degree of your control." The evenings and afternoons would be filled with contests too, but games of a less serious nature; all manner of flying competitions in the day, and by night singing contests, drinking contests, and so on. "Leave those to the flyers not involved in challenges," Sena warned. "You have no business with such foolery. It will only waste your strength. Watch if you will, but take no part."

When she had finished talking about the rules, Sena answered questions for a time, until she was asked one she could not answer. It came from Kerr, who had lost some weight during the three days at sea, and looked surprisingly fit. "Sena," he said, "how do we decide who is best to challenge?"

Sena looked at Maris. "We have had this problem before," she said. "The children of flyer families know everything they need to when they come of age to challenge, but we hear no flyer gossip, know little about who is strong or who is weak. What things I know myself are ten years out of date. Will you advise them, Maris?"

Maris nodded. "Well, obviously, you want to find someone you can beat. I'd say challenge those from Eastern or Western. The flyers from further away, they have come a very long distance to get here, and only the best care to make that flight. When the competition is in Southern, then weaker Southern flyers are on hand, and only the most skilled from Western make the flight.

"Also, you'd do best to avoid the flyers from Big Shotan. They are organized almost in a military fashion, and they practice and drill endlessly, and most are very good."

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"I challenged a woman from Big Shotan last year," Damen put in glumly. "She hadn't seemed very good beforehand, but she beat me easily enough when it mattered."

"She was probably being deliberately clumsy earlier, trying to lure a challenge from someone," Maris said. "I've known some who did that. No, you're safer to challenge someone other than a Shotaner."

"That still leaves a lot of people," Kerr said, unsatisfied. "I don't know any of them. Can't you tell me the name of someone I can beat?"

Val laughed. He was standing by the door, S'Rella close to him. "You can't beat anyone," he said, "unless it's Sena here. Challenge her."

"I'll beat you, One-Wing," Kerr snapped back.

Sena hushed him and glared at Val. "Quiet. I'll have no more of that, Val, or I may decide not to sponsor you at all." She looked back at Maris. "Kerr is right. Can you tell us specific flyers who are vulnerable?"

"You know, Maris," Val said. "Like Ari." He was smiling.

Once, not so very long ago, the suggestion would have filled Maris with horror. Once she would have thought it betrayal of the worst kind. Now she was not sure. The poorer flyers endangered themselves and their wings, and it was small enough secret who they were for one privy to flyer gossip in the Eyrie.

"I—I suppose I can suggest a few names," she said hesitantly. "Jon of Culhall, for one. His eyes are said to be weak, and I've never been impressed by his abilities. Bari of Poweet would be another. She gained a good thirty pounds this past year, a sure sign of a flyer whose will and body are failing." She named about a half-dozen more, all frequent subjects of flyer talk, reputed to be clumsy or careless or both, the old and the very young. Then, impulsively, she added one other name. "An Easterner I met yesterday might be worth a challenge. Arak of South Arren."

Val shook his head. "Arak is small but hardly frail," he said calmly. "He would outfly anyone here, except perhaps for me."

"Oh?" Damen, as ever, was annoyed by the implied slur. "We'll see about that. I think we can trust Maris' judgment before yours."

They talked for a few minutes more, the woodwingers eagerly discussing the names Maris had tossed out, adding what little they knew of them, suggesting other possibilities. Finally Sena chased them all away and told them to get some rest.

In front of the cabin she had shared with Maris, S'Rella bid goodnight to Val. "Go on," she told him. "I'll stay here tonight."

He looked a bit nonplussed. "Oh? Well, suit yourself."

When Val was out of sight, Maris said, "S'Rella? You're welcome, of course, but why...?"

S'Rella turned to her with a serious expression on her face. "You left out Garth," she said.

Maris was taken aback. She

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thought of Garth, of course. He was ill, drinking too much, gaining weight; it might be best for him to lose his wings. But she knew he would never agree to that, and he had been close to her for a long time, and she could not bring herself to name his name when speaking to the wood-wingers. She was afraid for what it might do to him. "I couldn't," she said. "He's my friend."

"Aren't we your friends too?"

"Of course."

"But not as close friends as Garth. You care more about protecting him than about whether we win our wings." There was more accusation in her voice than Maris would have thought possible.

"Maybe I was wrong to omit him," Maris admitted. "But I care for him too much, and it isn't easy—S'Rella, you haven't said anything about Garth to Val, have you?" She was suddenly worried.

"Never mind," S'Rella said. She brushed past Maris into the cabin and began to undress. Maris could only follow helplessly, already regretting her question about Val.

"I want you to understand," Maris said to S'Rella as the Southern girl slipped under the blankets.

"I understand," S'Rella replied. "You're a flyer." She rolled over on her side, her back to Maris, and would say no more.

The first day dawned bright and still and clear.

From where she stood outside the flyer's lodge, it seemed to Maris that half the population of Skulny had come to watch the competition. People were everywhere: wandering up and down the shores, climbing over the rugged cliff face to get better vantage points, sitting on grass and sand and stone alone or in groups. The beach was littered with children of all ages, running up and down kicking sand up in their wake, playing in the surf, shouting excitedly, running with their arms stretched out stiffly, playing at being flyers. Merchants moved among the crowds: one man decorated with sausages, another bearing wineskins, a woman wheeling a cart burdened with meat pies. Even the sea was full of spectators. Maris could see more than a dozen boats, laden with passengers, lying dead in the water just beyond the breakers, and she knew there must be even more beyond her sight.

Only the sky was empty.

Normally the sky would have been crowded with impatient flyers, full of the glint of silver wings wheeling and turning as they took some last-minute practice or simply tested the wind. But not today.

Today the air was still.

The dead calm was frightening. It was unnatural, impossible: along the coast the brisk seabreeze should have been constant. Yet a suffocating heaviness hung over everything. Even the clouds rested wearily in the sky.

Flyers paced the beach with their wings slung over their shoulders, glancing up uneasily from time to

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time, waiting for the wind to return, and talking among themselves about the calm in low, careful voices.

The land-bound were waiting eagerly for the competition to start, most of them unaware that anything was amiss. It was, after all, a beautiful, clear day. And, atop the cliffs, the judges were setting up their station and taking their seats. The competition could not wait on the weather: contests in this sluggish air might not be as exciting, but they would still be tests of skill and endurance.

Maris saw Sena leading the woodwingers across the sands towards the stairs leading up the cliffs. She hurried to join them.

A line had formed in front of the judges' table, behind which sat the Landsman of Skulny and four flyers, one each from Eastern, Southern, Western and the Outer Islands.

The Landsman's crier, a massive woman with a chest like a barrel, stood on the edge of the cliff. As each of the challengers named an opponent to the judges, she would cup her hands and shout out the name for all to hear, and her apprentices would take up the cry all along the beach, shouting it over and over until the flyer challenged acknowledged and moved off towards flyers' cliff. Then the challenger would go to meet his opponent, and the line would shuffle forward. Most of the names called were vaguely familiar to Maris, and she knew they were in-family challenges, parents testing children, or—in one case—a younger sibling disputing the right of her older brother to wear the family wings. But just before the woodwingers reached the judges' table, a black-haired girl from Big Shotan, daughter of a prominent flyer, named Bari of Poweet, and Maris heard Kerr swear softly. That was one good target gone.

Then it was their turn.

It seemed to Maris to be quieter than it had been before. The Landsman was animated enough, but the four flyer judges all looked grave and nervous. The Easterner was toying with the wooden telescope that had been set before her on the table, the muscular blond from the Outer Islands was frowning, and even Shalli looked concerned.

Sher went first, followed by Leya. Both named flyers that Maris had suggested to them. The crier bellowed out the names, and Maris heard the shouts being repeated up and down the beach.

Damen named Arak of South Arren, and the Eastern judge smiled slyly. "Arak will be *so* pleased," she said.

Kerr named Jon of Culhall. Maris was not happy with that. Jon was a weak flyer, a likely opponent, and she had been hoping that he would be challenged by one of the academy's better prospects—Val, S'Rella, or Damen. Kerr was the poorest of their six, and Jon would probably escape with his wings.

Val One-Wing moved to the table.

"Your choice?" rumbled the Outer Islander. He was tense, as were the other judges, even the Landsman. Maris realized she was on edge as well,

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afraid of what Val might do.

"Must I choose only one?" Val said sardonically. "The last time I competed, I had a dozen rivals."

Shalli replied sharply. "The rules have been changed, as you very well know. Multiple challenges have been disallowed."

"A pity," Val said. "I had hoped to win a whole collection of wings."

"It will be unfortunate if you win any wings at all, One-Wing," the Easterner said. "Others are waiting. Name your opponent and move on."

Val shrugged. "Then I name Corm, of Lesser Amberly."

Silence. Shalli looked shocked at first; then she smiled. The Easterner chuckled softly to herself, and the Outer Islander laughed openly.

"*Corm of Lesser Amberly!*" the crier thundered. "*Corm of Lesser Amberly!*" A dozen lesser voices echoed the call.

"I shall have to disqualify myself from this judging," Shalli said quietly.

"No, Shalli," said the judge from Eastern. "We have every confidence in your fairness." The others nodded.

"I do not ask you to step aside," Val said.

She looked at him, puzzled. "Very well. You contribute to your own fall. Corm is no grief-stricken child."

Val smiled at her enigmatically and moved off, and Maris and Sena surrounded him instantly. "Why did you do that?" Sena demanded. She was furious. "I have wasted my time with you, clearly. Corm! Maris, tell him how good Corm is, tell this willful fool how he has just thrown away his chance for a pair of wings."

Val was looking at her. "I think he knows how good Corm is," Maris said, meeting his eyes. "And he knows Shalli is his wife as well. I think that was why he chose him."

Val had no chance to disagree. Behind them, the line had moved on, and now the crier was shouting out another name. Maris heard it and whirled, her stomach twisting. "No," she said, though the word caught in her throat and no one heard. But the crier, as if in answer, shouted the name once again. "*Garth of Skulny! Garth of Skulny!*"

S'Rella was walking away from the judges, her eyes downcast. When she looked up at last to see Maris, her face was reddened, but defiant.

Two by two they flew off into the morning sun, struggling against the heavy air—the calm had broken, but the winds were still sluggish and erratic—with wings grown suddenly awkward. The flyers wore their own wings, the challengers pairs lent them by judges or friends or bystanders. The course would take them to a rocky little island named Lisle, where they would have to land and collect a marker from the waiting Landsman before proceeding back. It was a flight of some three hours under normal conditions; in this weather, Maris suspected it would take longer.

The woodwingers and their opponents launched in the order in which they had challenged. Sher and

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Leya got away well enough. Damen had more trouble; Arak abused him verbally while they were circling, waiting for the shout to start, and flew dangerously close to him as they veered out over the ocean. Even from a distance, Maris thought Damen looked shaken.

Kerr did even worse. He botched his leap badly, almost seeming to stumble from the cliff, and a cry went up from below as he plunged down sharply towards the beach. Finally he regained some control and pulled himself up, but by the time he sailed out over the sea his opponent had opened up a substantial lead.

Corm was cheerful and smiling as he prepared for his match against Val, joking and flirting with the two landbound girls who helped him open his wings, calling out comments to the spectators, waving to Shalli. He even threw a grim smile in Maris' direction. But he did not speak to Val, except once, before he launched. "This is for Ari," he shouted, his tone deadly, and then he was running and the wind took him. Val said nothing. He unfolded his own wings in silence, leaped from the cliff in silence, swept up and around near Corm in silence. The crier gave the shout, and the two of them broke in opposite directions, both coming around cleanly, the shadow of their wings passing across the upturned faces of the children on the beach. When they moved out of sight, Corm was ahead, but only by a wingspan.

Lastly came S'Rella and Garth. Maris stood with Sena near the judges, and she could look down on flyers' cliff and see them both, and watching them she felt heartsick. Garth was somber and pale, and from a distance he appeared far too stout and clumsy to have much of a chance against the slim young challenger. Both of them prepared quietly, Garth speaking only once or twice to his sister, S'Rella saying nothing at all. Neither got off to a good start, Garth having a bit more difficulty with the thick air because of his weight. S'Rella moved in front of him quickly, but he had closed the gap by the time they reached the horizon and vanished.

"I know you wanted to help your woodwingers, but couldn't you have stopped short of the betrayal of a friend?"

Dorrel's voice, deceptively calm. Feeling heartsick, Maris turned to face him. She had not spoken to him since that night on the beach.

"I didn't want it to happen, Dorr," she said. "But it may be for the best. We both know he's sick."

"Sick, yes," he snapped. "But I wanted to protect him—this will kill him if he loses."

"It may kill him if he wins."

"I think he'd prefer that. But if that girl takes his wings from him—he liked her, did you know that? He mentioned her to me, how nice she was, that night after Val wrecked the party in the lodge."

Maris, too, had been sick and angry over S'Rella's choice of opponent, but Dorrel's cold fury turned her feelings another way.

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"S'Kella hasn't done anything wrong," she said. "Her challenge was perfectly proper. And Val didn't wreck the party, as you say. How *dare* you say that: it was the flyers who insulted him and then walked out."

"I don't understand you," Dorrel said quietly. "I haven't wanted to believe how much you've changed. But it's true, it's as they say. You've turned against us. You prefer the company of the woodwingers and the one-winged to that of true flyers. I don't know you any more."

The unhappiness on his face hurt her as much as the harshness of his words. Maris forced herself to speak. "No," she said. "You don't know me any more."

Dorrel waited a moment, waited for her to say something more, but Maris knew that if she opened her mouth again it could only be for a scream or a sob. She could see anger warring with sadness on Dorrel's face, and anger finally won. He turned without another word and stalked away.

She felt, as she watched him walk away from her, that she was bleeding to death, and knew it was a self-inflicted wound.

"My choice," she whispered, and the tears ran down her face as she stared blindly out to sea.

They had flown away two by two; they returned, hours later, one by one.

Crowds of the land-bound waited on the beaches, their eager eyes scanning the horizon. They had engaged in their own games and contests, and in eating and drinking as they waited for the results of the flyers' contest.

The judges watched the skies through telescopes made for them by the finest lensmakers in Stormtown. On the table before them were a number of wooden boxes, one for each match, and piles of small pebbles: white pebbles for the flyers, black pebbles for the challengers. When a race was completed, each judge tossed a pebble into the wooden box. In a particularly close match, a judge might chose to vote for a tie by putting one stone of each color into the box. Or—but this was rarely done—if the winner was especially obvious, two white pebbles or two black could be cast.

The first flyer was sighted from the boats before anyone on shore saw him, and the shout went rippling over the water. On the beach, people began to stand and raise their hands to shield their eyes from the sun. Shalli lifted her telescope.

"See anything?" one judge asked.

"A flyer," Shalli said, laughing. "There's"—she tried to point—"below the cloud. Can't tell who it is."

The others looked. Maris could barely see the speck they were straining at; it might have been a kite or a rainbird to her, but they had their telescopes.

The Eastern woman recognized the flyer first. "That's Lane," she said, surprised. The others looked impressed as well. Lane had started in the third pair, Maris recalled, which meant that not only had he outflown his own son,

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but four others who had started ahead of him as well.

By the time he had landed, two other flyers had come surging out of the clouds, one several wingspans ahead of the other. The first pair to depart, the judges announced. One of the Landsman's attendants passed two of the wooden boxes down the table, and Maris heard the small clicks as the stones were dropped.

When the boxes were set aside, she drifted closer. In the first box, she counted five black pebbles and one white; four judges ruling for the challenger, one for a tie. The other, the box representing the race in which Lane had flown, had five whites in it, but as she watched the judges dropped in three more—two more flyers had appeared, far apart, but neither one was Lane's son. When he finally did appear, some twenty minutes later, five others had preceded him, and Lane's box had ten white pebbles in it. A formidable margin; the boy was probably lost already, Maris knew.

As each incoming flyer was recognized, the judges announced the name to the crier, who shouted it out for all to hear. Ragged cheers went up for some of the announcements from the land-bound thronging the beaches, and now and again Maris heard a loud groan as well. She suspected that most of the cheering was for financial reasons rather than personal. Most of the land-bound did not know flyers from other islands well enough to like or dislike them, but it was traditional to gamble on the outcome of the races, and she knew that a lot of money was changing hands below. It would be different, however, for S'Rella. This was Skulny, Garth's home island, and he was familiar and popular with many of the spectators.

"Arak of South Arren!" the crier yelled clearly for all to hear.

Sena swore softly. Maris borrowed a scope from Shalli. It was Arak, sure enough, flying alone, ahead of not only Damen but of Sher and Leya and their opponents as well.

One by one the woodwingers and their rivals struggled in.

Arak came first, then the man Sher had challenged, then Damen—he had passed Sher, Leya, and Leya's opponent, but was still hopelessly behind Arak—and Leya's rival. Minutes later, three flyers appeared bunched close together; Sher and Leya, inseparable as always, and close to them—moving ahead now—Jon of Culhall. Sena was swearing again, her face screwed up in disappointment. Maris tried to think of something reassuring to say, but nothing came to mind. The judges were dropping pebbles into the boxes. On the beach, Damen was down and getting out of his wings, while the others approached for a landing.

The sky was clear for a moment, with nothing to see. Kerr was losing badly too; Jon of Culhall had landed now, and he was nowhere in sight. Maris took advantage of the free moment to see how the judges had scored her students.

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She was not cheered. Sher's box had seven whites in it, Leya's had five, Damen's eight. Kerr had six against him at the moment, but the judges were dropping in more as minutes went by and he did not appear. "Come on," Maris mumbled under her breath.

"I see someone," the Southern judge said. "Very high, angling down now." The others lifted their scopes.

"Yes," one of them said. Now people on the beach had spotted the incoming flyer as well, and Maris could hear the buzz of speculation.

"Is it Kerr?" Sena said anxiously.

"I'm not sure," the Easterner answered. "Wait."

But it was Shalli who lowered her telescope first, looking stunned. "It's One-Wing," she said, in a small voice.

"Give me that," Sena said, snatching the telescope from her hands. "It is him." She passed the instrument over to Maris, beaming.

It was Val, all right. The wind had picked up quite a bit, and he was using it well, slipping from current to current, riding with a veteran's grace.

"Announce him," Shalli said numbly to the crier.

"Val One-Wing, Val of South Arren!"

The crowd was hushed for a moment, then erupted into noise; wild cheering, groans, cursing. No one was indifferent to Val One-Wing.

Another pair of silvered wings sliced into view from above. Corm, Maris guessed, and a glance through Shalli's telescope confirmed it. But he was behind, too far behind, with no chance of catching up. It was by no means a humiliation for him, but it was clearly a defeat.

"Maris," Shalli said, "I want you to see this, so everyone will know that my judging is fair." She opened her hand, and a single black pebble rested in the hollow of her palm, and as Maris watched she dropped it into the box. Four others followed it.

"Another one," someone said. "No, two."

Val had landed, and was calmly taking off his wings. As always he had refused the help of the land-bound children who crowded around him. Corm came sliding over the beach and cliffs, then swept around in an angry predatory circle, reluctant to come down and face the fact of his defeat. And Corm did not take defeat well.

All eyes moved to the two new flyers. "Garth of Skulny," the Outer Islander said, "and his challenger. She's close behind him."

"Yes, it's Garth," the Landsman put in. He had not been happy when S'Rella challenged one of his flyers; the prospect of losing a pair of wings was something no Landsman relished. "Fly, Garth," he said now, openly partisan. "Hurry."

Sena grimaced at him. "She's doing well," she said to Maris.

"Not well enough," Maris said. She could see them clearly now. S'Rella was one, two wingspans behind. But with the beach in sight, she seemed to be faltering. Garth began his descent, cutting sharply in

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front of her, and the turbulence created by his passing seemed to shake her. Her wings seesawed for a moment before she regained stability, giving him a chance to open his lead.

He passed over the beach about three wingspans ahead of her. The pebbles began to clatter into the box. Maris turned to see. It had been a close race, credible, spirited. Perhaps some of the judges would score it a tie.

One did, but only one. Maris counted. Five white pebbles for Garth, one lonely black for S'Rella.

"Let's go down to her," Maris said to Sena.

"Kerr hasn't come in yet," the teacher replied.

Maris had almost forgotten about Kerr. "Oh. I hope he's safe."

"I should never have sponsored him," Sena grumbled. "Damn his parents' iron."

They waited five minutes, ten, fifteen. Sher, Leya, and a very dispirited Damen all wandered up to join them. Other wings appeared on the horizon, but none of them was Kerr. Maris began to grow seriously afraid for his safety.

But finally he was there, the last of all those who had left that morning, and coming from the wrong direction too; he had been blown off course, he explained, and overshot Skulny. He was very sheepish about it.

By then, of course, ten white pebbles had been cast against him.

The crowds of land-bound were breaking up below, going off in search of food or drink or shade. Flyers were preparing for the afternoon games. Sena shook her head. "Come," she said, throwing an arm around Kerr. "Let's find the others and get some food into them."

The afternoon passed quickly. Some of the woodwingers went off to watch the flying games—an Outer Islander and two Shotaners won the individual prizes, and Western came away with the medals in the team races—while the others rested, talked, or played games. Damen had brought a geechi set, and he and Sher spent hours bent over it, both of them trying to recoup some of their lost pride.

In the evening the parties started. The woodwingers had a small party of their own outside Sena's cabin, in a halfhearted effort to lighten dampened spirits. Leya played the pipes and Kerr told sea stories, and all of them drank from the wineskin Maris had brought. Val was in his usual mood, cool and distant and invulnerable, but everyone else remained glum.

"No one has died," Sena said at last, her manner gruff. "When you lose an eye and shatter a leg as I did, then you will have a right to be morose. You don't have that right now. Get out of here, the lot of you, before you make me irritable." She waved her cane at them. "Off now, and to bed. We still have two more days of competition, and all of you can win your wings if you fly well enough. Tomorrow I expect more from each one of you."

Maris and S'Rella walked along the

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beach for a while, talking and listening to the slow restless sound of the sea, before heading back to the cabin they shared. "Are you angry with me," S'Rella said quietly, "for naming Garth?"

"I was," Maris said wearily. She did not have the heart to speak of her break with Dorrel. "Maybe I had no right to be. If you beat him, you have a right to his wings. I'm not angry with you any longer."

"I'm glad," S'Rella said. "I was angry with you, but I'm not now. I'm sorry for what I said."

Maris put an arm around her shoulders. They walked in silence for a minute, and then S'Rella said, "I've lost, haven't I?"

"No," Maris said. "You can still win. You heard what Sena said."

"Yes," said S'Rella, "but tomorrow they'll be judging grace, and that's always been my weakest point. Even if I win at the gates, I'll be so far behind that I won't be able to catch up with Garth."

"Hush," Maris said. "Don't talk like that. Just fly as best you can, and leave the rest to the judges. It's all you can do. If you do lose, there's always next year."

S'Rella nodded. They had reached the cabin. She darted ahead to get the door, and then drew back. "Oh," she said. Her voice was suddenly frightened. "*Maris,*" she whimpered.

Alarmed, Maris hurried to her side. S'Rella stood trembling and looking at their cabin door. Maris looked too, and felt sick.

Someone had nailed two dead rainbirds to the door. They hung limp and disheveled, bright feathers dark-and stained, the nails driven through their small bodies, blood dripping slowly and steadily to the ground.

Maris went inside for a knife and came back to take the grisly warnings from the door. But when she pried loose the first nail and the dead rainbird thumped to the ground, Maris discovered to her horror that it had not only been slaughtered, but mutilated as well.

One wing had been ripped from its body.

The second day was chilly and overcast. It was raining at dawn, and although the rain stopped by the time the morning contests got underway, the day remained damp and cold, the sky heavily overcast. The land-bound spectators were fewer—sitting on the beach was not so pleasant now—and the choppy seas carried only a few boats of observers.

But all that mattered to the flyers was the wind. The wind on the second day was strong and steady, promising the possibility of excellent flying.

Maris pulled Sena apart from the woodwingers on the beach below the cliff, and spoke to her quietly.

"Who would do a thing like that?" Sena demanded, her voice shocked.

Maris put her finger to her lips. She didn't want the others to overhear. S'Rella had been badly frightened by the incident, and there was no sense in alarming the others.

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"A flyer, I would guess," Maris said grimly. "A sick, bitter flyer. But we have no proof of anything. It could have been done by a flyer who was challenged, or the friend of someone we challenged, or simply some stranger who hates woodwingers. It might even be some local land-bound who lost money on a bet over Val One-Wing. My own suspicions fall on Arak, but I can't prove that."

Sena nodded. "You were right to keep it quiet. I only hope S'Rella wasn't too disturbed by it."

Maris glanced at where S'Rella stood among the other students, talking softly to Val. "She needs to do well today, or it is all over for her."

"They're starting," Damen called, pointing up at the cliffs.

The first pair of contestants had taken to the air and were moving quickly above the beach. They would circle over the water, Maris knew, and each would go into a sequence of stunts and maneuvers designed to demonstrate flying skills. The specific stunts were the choice of each individual flyer; some satisfied themselves with performing basics as flawlessly as possible, while others tried to be daring and ambitious. Seldom were there clear-cut winners or losers; it was in this event that the judges wielded the most power.

Sena sent the woodwingers up one stair to flyers' cliff to prepare for their own matches, while she and Maris returned to the judging area. Shalli gave them a curt nod when they arrived; the others were too engrossed in the flying to notice their arrival.

The first two pairs were nothing special, merely long sequences of launchings, landings, and graceful, sweeping turns, all done skillfully but not spectacularly. The third match was something else. The flyer Lane, who had raced so well yesterday, was a splendid stunter as well. Leaping from the cliff, he plunged down low over the beach, skimming so close to the sand that land-bound had to duck to be out of his way. Then he found a riser and swooped up, up, soaring through the overcast and out of sight before he came diving down again, with reckless speed, only to pull out at the last possible instant. He attempted verticle banks and a full loop, and only went into a stall once—he broke out quickly—and Maris found herself admiring his verve. His son was no match for him; the poor boy would be waiting a long time for wings, unless he challenged out-of-family next year. After they had finished, Maris counted eighteen stones in the voting box, eight new ones added to the ten Lane had won yesterday.

Sher was the first woodwinger to try the air. It was a good effort; a clean launch, almost perfect but for a slight wobble, followed by a standard sequence of turns, circles, dives, and climbs, all performed smoothly. Sher seemed lithe and buoyant in the air, compared to the stolid competency of the opposition. Maris would have given the judgment to Sher by a slight margin, but when she looked she found the judges had been more

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critical of the woodwinger than she. Two had given the victory to the flyer, two had called it even, and only one had cast for Sher, who was now down eleven stones to three.

Sena sighed when Maris told her the count. "I've grown used to it. I always hate the stunting. Perhaps the judges try to be fair, but the bias creeps in nonetheless. Nothing can be done about it, except to have our woodwingers fly so well that they can't be denied their victories."

Leya was next, with the same sequence Sher had flown, all basic, but with less luck. The wind shifted during the match, robbing Leya of the fluid grace that Maris had so often seen her display, giving her flight a ragged appearance. And several times gusts threw her sideways, breaking up what had been well-executed turns. Her rival had trouble as well, but less. Four judges gave him their stones, and only one made it a tie, leaving Leya behind ten to one.

Damen was more ambitious than either of them. Today, when Arak threw insults at him, Damen spat them right back, which brought a smile to Maris' lips. And he began with a passable imitation of the spectacular swoop-on-the-beach that the flyer Lane had used. Arak tried to shadow him, to fly so close that Damen would be forced to break off his glide clumsily, but Damen twisted away with a graceful bank and vanished into a cloud, losing the older flyer. One of the judges, the Outer Islander, grumbled about Arak's tactics, but the others only shrugged. "Whatever else he might be, he is still the better flyer," the Easterner insisted. "Note how tight his turns are. The boy is spirited, but slipshod." Maris had to admit that she was right; Damen habitually slid wide on turns, especially downwind turns.

When they scored it, four judges cast for Arak, only the Outer Islander for Damen.

"Jon of Culhall, Kerr the Woodwinger!" the crier bellowed. Sena made a tsk-ing noise, and Kerr soon proved she was right. The wind was gusting, he was as clumsy as ever, and probably still despondent about yesterday's performance.

After a few minutes, Sena faced Maris. "Even with one eye, this is painful to watch," she said.

Jon of Culhall accumulated eight white pebbles, and Maris pitied Kerr.

"Corm of Lesser Amberly," announced the crier, *"Val One-Wing, Val of South Arren!"*

They stepped into view on flyers' cliff, wings strapped in place but folded, and Maris could feel a ripple of excitement go through the onlookers. People along the beach were making noise, and even the landsguard and attendants who stood near the Landsman moved closer to watch.

Corm was not laughing or joking today. He stood as silently as Val, his dark hair tossing in the wind, while his wings were unfolded and locked by others. Val, as usual, waved away the help offered him.

"Corm can be quite graceful,"

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Maris warned Sena. "Val may have trouble today."

"Yes," Sena said, with a pointed glance back to where Shalli sat among the judges.

The crowd was growing impatient; the flyers still had not launched. Corm's helpers had stepped back from him, and he stood with his silver wings fully extended, but Val had made no move to unfold his own. Instead he kept examining the joints of one wing, as if looking for something wrong. Corm said something to him, sharply, and Val looked up from what he was doing and made a broad gesture.

"All right," Corm said clearly, and then he was running, and an instant later he was aloft.

"There's Corm," Shalli said. "Where's One-Wing?"

"Doesn't he know that this will cost him?" Sena muttered.

Maris gripped Sena tightly by the elbow. "He's going to do it again," she said urgently.

"Do *what?*" Sena said, but even as she spoke a light broke over her face and Maris knew she understood.

Val jumped.

It was a long way down, and only sand and spectators below, and trickier and more dangerous than the same stunt over water. But he was doing it, falling, his wings flapping behind him like a silver cape. Shalli and the Southern judge jumped to their feet, two of the landsguard rushed to the cliffside, even the crier gave a grunt of surprise. Maris heard people screaming, somewhere below, and there was running as well.

Val's wings took flower.

For an instant it did not seem to be enough. He still fell, speed increasing, even with the wings fully extended. But then he yanked himself to one side and that did it, suddenly he was veering up sharply, angling over the beach and out towards sea. People were dropping to the sand, and someone was still screaming, but there was shouting as well.

Then silence, a hush, a long indrawn breath. Val skimmed the waves, gliding as if over ice, and smoothly began to rise. Serenely he flew out to where Corm, almost unnoticed, had performed a difficult loop.

The applause began, and the cheering, and all along the shore landbound began clapping and chanting the refrain, "One-Wing, One-Wing, One-Wing," over and over. Even Lane's spectacular plunge had not thrilled them as Val had.

The judge from Eastern was laughing. "I never thought I'd see that again," she exclaimed. "Damn, *damn.* Even Raven himself never did it better."

Shalli looked miserable. "A cheap trick," she said. "And a dangerous one as well."

"Probably," the Outer Islander agreed, "but I've never seen anything like it. How did he do it anyway?"

The Easterner tried to explain, and the two of them fell to talking. In the distance, Val and Corm were going through their stunts. Val flew well,

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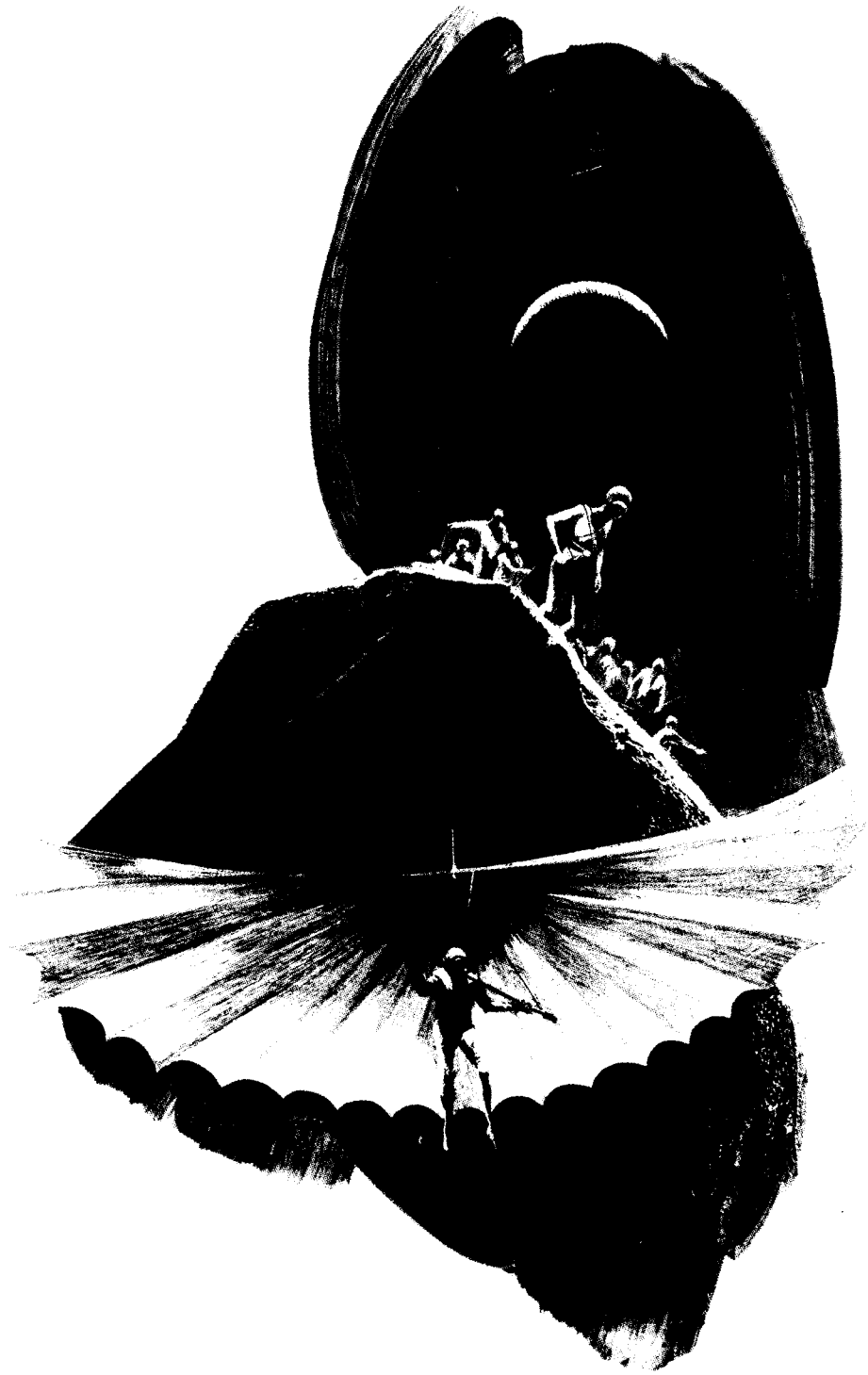

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though Maris noted that his upwind turns were still not all they should be. Corm flew better, matching Val stunt-for-stunt and doing each of them just a little more gracefully, with the skill that comes with decades of flying. But he flew hopelessly, Maris thought; after Raven's Fall, no amount of finesse could redress the balance.

She was right. Shalli was the only exception. "Corm was much superior overall," she insisted. "One foolhardy stunt does not change that." She dropped a white stone into the box with a flick of her wrist.

But the other judges just smiled at her indulgently, and the four pebbles that followed hers were black.

"Garth of Skulny, S'Rella the Woodwinger!"

S'Rella and Garth, though totally different in appearance, looked almost alike this morning, Maris thought as she watched them prepare. Garth should have been elated by his victory yesterday, and the likelihood that his wings were safe, but if anything he seemed paler and more aged today. He hardly spoke to Riesa, and went about donning his wings with a wooden deliberateness. S'Rella bit her lip as she let the helpers unfold her wings, and looked as if she were holding back tears.

Neither of them attempted anything spectacular on launching. Garth banked right, S'Rella left, and they passed above the beach and the boats with approximately equal ease. A few of the locals waved to Garth and shouted his name as he sailed by, but otherwise the crowd was silent, still breathless over Val's leap.

Sena shook her head. "S'Rella was never as pretty to watch as Sher or Leya, but she can fly better than that." She had just stalled and lost altitude on a rather routine upwind turn, and Maris had to agree with the teacher's assessment. S'Rella was not flying well.

"She's just going through the motions," Maris said. "I think she's still shaken by last night."

Garth was taking full advantage of his opponent's lassitude. He soared with his usual competence, performed graceful, langurous turns, and slid into a loop. It was not an especially good loop, but S'Rella was attempting none at all.

"This one will be easy to judge," the Landsman of Skulny said with relief. He was already looking about for a white pebble. Maris could only hope that he would not drop two.

"Look at that," Sena snorted with disgust. "My best student, and she's wandering all over the sky like some eight-year-old on her first flight."

"What's Garth doing?" Maris wondered aloud. His wings were moving out to sea, tilting first one way and then the other, almost shaking. "That's an awful wobble."

"If the judges notice," Sena said sourly. "Look, he's righted it now."

He had; now the great silver wings had straightened, and Garth was sailing steadily away from them, riding on the wind, sinking slightly.

"He's just flying," Maris said,

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puzzled. "He isn't doing any stunts."

Garth continued to move off, towards the deep waters beyond the breakers. He flew gracefully, but so *straight*; it was no great task to be graceful when yielding to the wind. Gradually he was descending. Now he was about thirty feet above the water, and still sank. His flight seemed so calm, so peaceful.

Maris gasped. "He's falling," she said. She turned to the judges. "Help him," she shouted. "He's *falling*!"

"What's she yelling about?" the Easterner asked.

Shalli put her telescope to her eye, found Garth in it. He was skimming the waves now. "She's right," she said, in a small voice.

Instantly there was chaos. The Landsman jumped to his feet and began to wave his arms and shout orders, and two of the landsguard went sprinting off down the stairs, and the others all started running somewhere. The crier cupped her huge hands and shouted, *"Help him! Help the flyer! People in the boats, help the flyer!"* Down on the beach other criers repeated the chant, and spectators ran for the shore shouting and pointing. Now it was clear for everyone to see.

Garth hit the water. His forward motion sent him skipping over the surface, once, twice, and sheets of spray fanned out from his wings, but he lost speed rapidly, slowed, stopped.

"It's all right, Maris," Sena was saying, "it's all right. Look, they'll get him." A small sailboat, alerted by the shouts of the criers, was moving in on him rapidly. Maris watched it with apprehension. It took them a minute to reach him, another minute to fish him out in a net they tossed over the side. But from this distance, she had no way fo telling whether he was dead or alive.

The Landsman lowered his telescope. "They got him, and the wings as well."

S'Rella was flying low above the sailboat that had rescued Garth. Too late she had realized what was happening, and started after him, but it was unlikely she would have been able to help in any event.

The Landsman, grim, ordered another of his landsguard down to find out Garth's condition, and walked back to his seat. The judges talked nervously among themselves and Maris and Sena shared an anxious silence until the man returned, ten minutes later. "He is alive and recovering, though he swallowed some water," the landsguard announced. "They are taking him back to his house."

"What happened?" the Landsman demanded.

"His sister says he has been ill for some time," the man replied. "It seems he had an attack."

The Landsman swore. "He never told me any such thing." He glared at the four judges. "Must we score this?"

"I'm afraid we must," Shalli said gently, "and we do not have much choice about how, either." She picked up a black pebble.

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"Her?" the Landsman said. "Garth outflew her easily, until he was taken sick. You mean to give the *girl* the victory over Garth?"

"You can't be serious, sir," the big man from the Outer Islands said. "Your Garth fell into the ocean, Landsman. He might have stunted as well as Lane and he'd still lose."

"I must agree," the Easterner said. "Landsman, you are not a flyer, you do not understand. Garth is fortunate to be alive. If he had fallen while flying a mission, with no ship to save him, he would have been food for a scylla."

"He was sick," the Landsman insisted, he was frantic not to lose the wings for Skulny.

"It doesn't matter," the quiet Southern judge put in, and she cast the first pebble into the voting box with a flick of her thumb. It was black. Three other black stones followed in quick succession, Shalli placing hers with obvious dismay, until the Landsman defiantly added the only white one.

Garth's fall intensified the bitterness of flyers and woodwingers both. The afternoon games, stunts conducted in an increasingly dark and stormy cloud, had little zest to them. An Easterner from Kite's Landing was the grand winner, but she had scant competition, as many of the flyers decided to drop out at the last moment. A few of those not directly involved in challenges were even seen taking wing for their home islands. Kerr, the only woodwinger who had bothered to attend the games, reported that the spectators had grown sparse as well, and all their talk was of Garth.

Sena tried to encourage the students, but it was a formidable task. Sher and Leya were philosophical about their chances, neither expecting to win, but Damen was in a dismal condition and Kerr seemed ready to slink off and slit his own throat. S'Rella was nearly as despondent. She was tired and withdrawn for most of the afternoon, and that evening she quarreled with Val.

It was just after dinner. Damen was setting up his geechi board and looking for an opponent, and Leya had gotten out her pipes again. Val found S'Rella sitting with Maris on the beach, and joined them uninvited. "Let's walk down to the tavern," he suggested to S'Rella, "and celebrate our victories. I want to get free of these losers and hear what people are saying about us, maybe even get down some bets for tomorrow."

"I've got no victory to celebrate," S'Rella replied sullenly. "I flew horribly. Garth was much better than I was. I didn't deserve to win."

"You win or you lose, S'Rella," Val said. "What you deserve has nothing to do with anything. Come on." He tried to take her by the hand and pull her to her feet, but S'Rella yanked loose of him angrily.

"Don't you even *care* about what happened to Garth?"

"Not particularly. You shouldn't either. As I recall, the last thing you

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said to him was how much you hated him. It would have gone better for you if he'd drowned. Then they would have to give you his wings. As it is, they'll try to find some way to cheat you out of them."

Maris, listening, began to lose her temper. "Stop it, Val," she said.

"Just keep out of this, flyer," he snapped. "This is between us."

S'Rella jumped to her feet. "Why are you always so hateful? You're cruel to Maris all the time, and she's only tried to help you. And the things you've been saying about Garth—Garth was *nice* to me, and what did I do, you made me try to take his wings, and now he almost died and you're saying awful things about him. Don't you say another word! *Don't you!*"

Val's face became an expressionless mask. "I see," he said flatly. "Suit yourself. If you care so much for flyers, go visit Garth and tell him to keep his wings. I'll celebrate by myself." He turned away and began to stride across the sand, toward the sea road and his tavern.

Maris took hold of S'Rella's hand. "Would you like to visit Garth?" she said impulsively.

"Could we?"

Maris nodded. "He and Riesa share a big house a half mile up the hill road. He likes to stay close to the sea and the lodge. We could go see how he is."

S'Rella was more than willing, she was eager, and they set off at once. Maris had been a bit afraid of the reception they might meet when they arrived, but her own concern about Garth's condition was great enough that she was willing to take the risk. She needn't have worried. Riesa beamed at them when she opened the door, and all at once began to cry, and Maris had to take her in her arms and comfort her. "Oh, come see him, come see him," Riesa kept saying through her tears. "He'll be so glad."

Garth was propped up in bed against a mountain of pillows, a shaggy woolen blanket thrown over his legs. His face was frighteningly pale and puffed-up, but when he saw them in the doorway his smile was real enough. "Ah," he boomed, his voice loud as ever, "Maris! And the little demon who's out to take my wings." He waved them to his side. "Come and sit and talk to me. Riesa does nothing but fuss and fret, and she won't even bring me any of her ale."

Maris smiled. "You don't need any ale," she said primly as she walked to his bedside and kissed him lightly on the brow.

S'Rella hung back by the door, however. When he saw that, Garth's face turned serious. "Ah, S'Rella," he said, "don't be frightened. I'm not angry with you."

She came forward to stand by Maris. "You're not?"

"No," Garth said firmly. "Riesa, bring them seats." His sister did as he asked, and when they were seated Garth resumed. "Oh, I was furious when you challenged me—hurt, too—I can't deny that."

"I'm sorry," S'Rella blurted. "I didn't want to hurt you. I don't hate

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you—what I said—at the lodge—"

He waved her quiet. "I know that. And you needn't be sorry. The water was terribly cold out there, but maybe it woke me up a bit, and I've had all afternoon to lie here and think. I've been a fool, and I'm lucky I have the breath to say so. I did wrong to keep it secret, the way that I was feeling, and you did right to name me when you knew." He shook his head. "I couldn't accept being a land-bound, you know. I love the flying too much, all my friends, the travel. But it's over, my little swim proved that, the only question is whether I'm to be a live land-bound or a drowned flyer at the end of it all. Before today, I'd always managed to shrug off the pain, get where I was going. But this morning—ah, it was miserable, shooting pains in my arms and legs. But I don't want to talk about that. Bad enough it happened." He reached across and took S'Rella by the hand. "What I mean to say, S'Rella, is that I can't compete tomorrow, and I wouldn't if I could. Riesa and the sea have brought me to my senses. The wings are yours."

S'Rella could hardly believe him. She stared at him wide-eyed, and a tremulous smile broke across her face.

"What will you do, Garth?" Maris asked, her voice showing concern.

He grimaced. "That depends on the healers," he said. "Seems to me I have three choices. Maybe I'll be a corpse, and maybe I'll be a cripple, but if I can find a healer who knows what he's about, I thought I might try my hand at trade. I've got enough iron put aside to buy myself a ship, and I could travel that way, see other islands—though I'm half scared out of my wits at the idea of traveling by sea." He chuckled. "You and Dorr used to kid me about being a trader. You remember, Maris? Said I'd trade my wings if the deal was good enough, just because I liked to swap a little now and again. Well, some trader I turned out to be. Here S'Rella gets my wings and doesn't give me anything." He laughed, and Maris found herself joining him.

They talked for over an hour, about traders and sailors and finally flyers, relaxing as they laughed at Garth's jokes and exchanged gossip. "Corm is livid about your friend Val," Garth said at one point, "and I can't say I blame him. He's a good enough flyer that he never considered that he might lose his wings, and here it seems he's lost them, and to One-Wing of all people. Did you have anything to do with that, Maris?"

She shook her head. "Hardly. All Val's idea. He'll never admit it, but I think he wanted to beat a flyer of the top rank to make them forget about Ari. The fact that Corm's wife sits among the judges just added an extra flair to the feat, and of course it gave him a convenient excuse if he lost. He could blame it on flyer prejudice."

Garth nodded and made a rude joke about Corm, then turned to his sister. "Riesa, why don't you show S'Rella our house?"

Reisa took the hint. "Yes, do come

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see," she said. S'Rella followed her from the room.

"She's nice," Garth said when they were gone, "and she does remind me an awful lot of you, Maris. Do you remember when we first met? I was—well, less than twenty, and you were even younger than she is. Do you remember?"

Maris smiled at him. "I remember. It was my first flight to the Eyrie. They were having a party for some Outer Islander, but I half thought it was given in my honor."

Garth laughed. "Ah, you beautiful ones are always vain. You remember Raven? He was there too. That was where he did his trick."

"I've never forgotten it," Maris answered him.

"Did you teach it to One-Wing?"

"No."

Garth laughed again. "Everyone is certain you did. We all remember how impressed you were by Raven. Coll even wrote a song about him, as I seem to recall."

Maris smiled. "Yes."

Garth started to say something else, then thought the better of it. For a long moment the room was filled with silence, and the smile slowly faded on Garth's face.

He began to cry, fighting it and losing, and he reached out his big hands for her, and Maris came and sat on the edge of the bed and hugged him, and ran her hand across his brow. "I knew—I didn't want S'Rella to see me—ah, Maris it's so damned rotten, so *damned*—"

"Oh, Garth," she whispered, kissing him lightly and fighting to hold back her own tears.

"Come and see me," he said. "I—you know how—when you don't fly, you can't go to the Eyrie—you know—bad enough to lose your freedom, and the wind—but I don't want to lose you too, and my other friends, just because—oh, damn, *damn these tears*—visit me, Maris, promise, promise."

"I promise, Garth," she said, trying to keep her voice light. "Unless you gain so much weight that I can't stand to look at you."

Beneath his tears, he laughed. "Ah," he said. "Here—and just when I thought I could get fat in peace. You—"

Footsteps sounded outside, Riesa and S'Rella returning, and Garth quickly used the blanket to dry his tears. "Go," he said, smiling again, "go, I'm tired, you've exhausted me. But come back tomorrow when it's all over and tell me how the games finished out."

Maris nodded. And S'Rella came up to her side and bent to give Garth a quick, shy kiss before they left.

They walked the half-mile back to the village slowly, talking as they went, savoring the cool wind that moved through the night. They spoke of Garth, and a little bit of Val, and then S'Rella mentioned the wings—*her* wings—with wonder in her voice. "I'm a flyer," she said happily. "It's really true."

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But it was not that simple.

Sena was waiting for them inside their cabin, sitting on the edge of a bed and looking impatient. She rose when they entered. "Where have the two of you been?"

"We went to see how Garth is," Maris answered. "What is it? Is anything wrong?"

"I don't know. We have been summoned up to the lodge house by the judges." She gave S'Rella a meaningful look with her good eye. "All three of us, and we're late."

They left at once. On the way, Maris told Sena what Garth had said about giving up the wings, but the old teacher did not seem pleased. "Well, we shall see about that," she said. "I wouldn't go flying off with them yet."

The flyers were not partying tonight. The main room of the lodge was sparsely populated, only a half-dozen Western flyers Maris knew vaguely sitting and drinking, and the atmosphere was anything but festive. One of them stood up when Maris and the others entered. "In the back room," he said.

The five judges were squabbling around a circular table, but they broke off in mid-argument when the door opened. Shalli stood up. "Maris, Sena, S'Rella, do come in," she said. "And close the door."

They took seats around the table, and Shalli folded her hands neatly in front of her as she resumed. "We summoned you because we have a dispute, and it involves young S'Rella here, and you have a right to state your views. Garth has sent word that he will not fly tomorrow—"

"We know," Maris broke in. "We just came from him."

"Good," Shalli said. "Then perhaps you understand our problem. We must decide what to do with the wings."

S'Rella looked stricken. "They're mine," she said. "Garth said so."

The Landsman of Skulny was drumming his fingers on the table and frowning. "The wings are not Garth's to give" he said loudly. "Here, child, I will ask you a question. If you are given the wings, will you promise to make a home here, and fly for Skulny?"

S'Rella did not flinch under his tense gaze, Maris noted with approval. "No," she answered bluntly. "I couldn't. I mean, Skulny is nice, I'm sure, but—but this isn't my home. I'm going to return to Southern with the wings, to Veleth, the little island where I was born."

The Landsman shook his head violently. "No, no, *no.* You may return to this Southern rock if you wish, but if you do it will be without the wings." He looked at the other judges. "See. I gave her a chance. Now, I insist." He sought their support.

Sena thumped a fist on the table. "What is this? What is going on? S'Rella has a right to the wings, more right than anyone else. She challenged Garth and he has failed the test. How can you speak of not giving her the wings?" She looked from judge to judge furiously.

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Shalli, who seemed to be the spokesman, gave an apologetic shrug. "We have a disagreement," she said. "The question is how tomorrow's contest should be scored. Some of us feel that if Garth does not fly, S'Rella must be given the victory by forfeit. But the Landsman is of the opinion that we cannot vote on a contest in which only one flyer flies. He insists that the decision be made on the basis of the two legs already completed, and on them alone. If that is done, Garth is presently ahead six stones to five, and would retain the wings."

"But Garth has renounced the wings!" Maris said. "He can't fly, he is too ill."

"The law provides for that," the Landsman said. "If a flyer is sick, his wings are given over to the Landsman and the island's other flyers to dispose of, provided he or she has no heir. We will give the wings to someone worthy of them, someone who is willing to take up residence on Skulny. I offered that chance to the girl here and you all heard her answer. It must be someone else then."

"We had hoped that S'Rella would consent to remain on Skulny," Shalli said "That would have resolved our differences."

"No," S'Rella repeated stubbornly, but she looked miserable.

"What you propose is a cheat," Sena said bitterly to the Landsman.

"I am inclined to agree with that," put in the big man from the Outer Islands. He ran his fingers through unkempt blond hair. "The only reason Garth stands ahead now is because you cast a stone for him today, even after he fell into the ocean, Landsman. That was hardly fair."

"I judged it fair," the Landsman said angrily.

"Garth wants S'Rella to take his wings," Maris said. "Don't his wishes matter in this?"

"No," the Landsman said. "The wings were never his alone. They are a trust, they belong to all the people of Skulny." He looked around at his fellow judges, imploring. "It is not fair to give them away to this Southerner, to reduce Skulny to only two flyers without cause. Listen to me. If Garth had been well, he would have defended his wings ably against any challenge, and it never would have come to this. If he had been sick and had come to me and told me, as your own flyer law requires, then by now we would have found someone else to wear the wings, someone capable of retaining them for Skulny. It is only because Garth chose to conceal his condition that we are in this predicament. Will you punish all my island because a flyer kept a secret?"

Maris had to admit that there was some justice in the argument. The judges seemed swayed too. "What you say is true," said the small woman from Southern. "I would be glad to see a new set of wings come south, but your claim is hard to deny."

"S'Rella has rights too," Sena insisted. "You must be fair to her."

"If you give the wings to the Landsman," Maris added, "you will be tak-

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ing away her right to challenge. She is only down one stone. She has an excellent chance."

Then S'Rella spoke up. "I didn't earn the wings," she said uncertainly. "I was ashamed of the way I flew today. But I could win them fairly, if I had another chance. I know I could. Garth wants me to."

Shalli sighed. "S'Rella, my dear, it isn't that simple. We can't start the whole competition over simply for your sake alone."

"She should get the wings," the Outer Islander grumbled. "Here, I cast tomorrow's pebble for her already. That makes it six to six. Will anyone join me?" He looked around.

"There are no pebbles here to cast," the Landsman snapped, "and you cannot have a contest with only one flyer." He crossed his arms and sat back, scowling.

"I fear I must vote with the Landsman," the Southerner said, "lest I be charged with unfairly favoring a neighbor."

That left Shalli and the woman from Eastern, both of whom looked hesitant. "Isn't there some way we can be fair to all?" Shalli said.

Maris looked at S'Rella and then touched her on her arm. "Are you truly willing to fly again in contest, to try to earn the wings?"

"Yes," S'Rella said, "I want to win them right. I want to deserve them, no matter what Val says."

Maris nodded and turned back to the judges. "Then I have a proposition for you," she said. "Landsman, you have two other flyers on Skulny. Do you think them able enough?"

"Yes," he said suspiciously, quickly. "What of it?"

"Only this—I propose that you resume the match. Keep the score as it stands, with S'Rella down one stone. But since Garth cannot fly, name a proxy for him, another of your flyers to bear wings in his place. If your proxy wins, then Skulny retains the wings and you can award them to whom you choose. If S'Rella wins, well, then no one can dispute her right to go south as a flyer. What do you say?"

The Landsman thought it over for a minute. "Well," he said, "I could accept that. Jirel can fly in Garth's stead. If this girl can outfly her, then she has earned her place, though it will not make me happy."

Shalli looked immensely relieved. "An excellent suggestion," she said, smiling. "I knew we could count on Maris for good sense."

"Are we all agreed, then?" the Easterner said quickly.

All of the judges nodded except the Outer Islander, who shook his head again and muttered, "The girl should get the wings. The man fell into the ocean." But he did not dissent too loudly and finally conceded.

Outside the lodge in the cool night air, a thin rain had begun to fall. But Sena stopped them anyway, looking troubled. "S'Rella," she said, leaning on her cane, "are you certain this is what you want? You might lose the wings this way. Jirel is said to be a good flyer. And perhaps we could

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have won the judges to our side, if we had argued longer."

"No," S'Rella said gravely. "No, I want it this way."

Sena looked her in the eye for a long time, and finally nodded. "Good," she said, satisfied. "Let's get you home, then. Tomorrow there is flying to be done."

On the third day of the competition, Maris woke before dawn, confused by the dark and the cold and aware that something was very wrong. There was a hammering inside her head, and she shook it to try to still the insistent noise before she realized it was real. Someone was pounding on the door.

"Maris," S'Rella said from the next bed. "Should I get it?" Maris could not see her; it was well before dawn, and their candles weren't lit.

"No," Maris whispered. "Quiet." She was afraid. The pounding went on and on, without let-up, and Maris remembered the dead rainbirds that had been left for them and wondered who was on the other side of the door at this hour, trying so angrily to get them to open. She climbed out of bed and padded across the room, and in the dark she managed to locate the blade she had used to pry free the birds. It was nothing, a little metal table knife, not a fighting blade at all, but it gave her confidence. Only then did she go to the door. "Who's there?" she demanded. "Who is it?"

The pounding stopped. "Raggin," said a deep voice that she did not recognize. Its gruffness startled her.

"Raggin? I know no Raggin. What do you want?"

"I'm from the Iron Axe," the voice said. "You know Val? The one who's been staying with me?"

Maris felt her fears drain away, and she hurried to open the door. The man standing in the starlight was gaunt and stooped, with a hook nose and a dirty beard, but he was suddenly familiar to her; the barkeep from Val's tavern. "Is something wrong?"

"I was closing up, and your friend hadn't been in yet. Thought he'd just found some pretty to sleep with, but then I found him outside, lying in the back. Somebody hurt him bad."

"*Val,*" S'Rella said. She rushed to the door. "Where is he? Is he all right? Where is he?"

"He's up in his room," Raggin said. "I dragged him up the stairs, and it wasn't easy. But I remembered he knew people up here so I thought I better come and ask around, and they sent me here. You gonna come down? *I* don't know what to do for him."

"Right away," Maris said urgently. "S'Rella, get dressed." She hurried to collect her own clothes and slipped into them, and shortly they were hurrying down the sea road. Maris had a lantern in one hand. The road ran along the seaside cliffs for part of its length, and a misstep in the dark could prove to be fatal.

The tavern was dark and shuttered, the front door braced from inside with a heavy wooden beam. Raggin left them standing in front of it and

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vanished around back to enter by what he called his "secret way." When he opened the door from the inside, he said, "Got to lock up good, lots of hard types around here. I got customers you wouldn't believe."

They hardly listened. S'Rella ran up the stairs to the room she had sometimes shared with Val, and Maris came close behind. S'Rella was lighting a candle by Val's bedside when Maris caught up to her.

Flickering ruddy light filled the small room, and the shape huddled beneath the blankets moved with a small animal whimper. S'Rella set down the candle and then she pulled off the blankets.

Val's eyes found her, and he seemed to recognize her—his left arm clutched at her hand desperately. But when he tried to speak, the only sounds he could make were choking, pain-wracked sobs.

Maris felt sick. He had been beaten savagely about the head and shoulders, and his face was an unrecognizable mass of swelling and bruises. An open scar along one cheek was still bleeding, and he had dried blood all over his shirt and jaw. His mouth was bloody too, when he opened it and tried to speak.

"*Val!*" S'Rella cried, weeping. She touched his brow and he shrank away from her hand, trying to speak.

Maris came closer. Val was holding S'Rella tight with his left hand, clutching at her, pulling. But his right arm just lay still along his side, and there was something wrong, blood on the sheet beneath it. The angle that it lay was impossible, and his jacket was ripped, bloody. She knelt by the right side of the bed and touched his arm gingerly, and Val shrieked so loudly that S'Rella jumped away, terrified. It was only then that Maris saw the jagged edge of bone peeking through his skin and clothing.

Raggin was observing them from the doorway. "His arm's broke, don't touch it," he said helpfully. "He screams when you do. You shoulda heard the noise he made when I carried him up here. I think his leg's broke too, but I'm not sure."

Val had quieted, but his breath came in painful gasps. Maris was on her feet. "Why didn't you call a healer?" she demanded of Raggin. "Why didn't you give him something for the pain?"

Raggin drew back, shocked, as if those ideas had never occurred to him. "I got you, didn't I? Who's gonna pay a healer? He's not, that's for sure. Don't have near enough. I went through his things."

Maris balled her fists and tried to control her fury. "You're going to go and fetch a healer right now," she said. "And I don't care if you have to run ten miles, you're going to do it *fast*. If you don't, I swear I'll talk to the Landsman and have this place closed down."

"Flyers," the barkeep spat. "Throwing your weight around, eh? Well, I'll go, but who's gonna pay this healer? That's what I want to know, and he'll want to know too."

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"Damn you," Maris said. "I'll pay, damn you, *I'll* pay. He's a flyer, and if his bones don't heal right, if they aren't taken care of, *he'll never fly again.* Now *hurry*!"

Raggin gave her a last sour look and turned for the stairs. Maris went back to Val's bedside. He was making whimpering noises and trying to move, but every motion seemed to wrack him with pain.

"Can't we help him?" S'Rella said, glancing up at Maris.

"Yes," Maris said. "This is a tavern, after all. Go downstairs and find the stock, bring up a few bottles. That should help a little with the pain, until the healer arrives."

S'Rella nodded and started for the door. "What should I bring?" she asked. "Wine?"

"No, we need something stronger. Look for some brandy. Or—that liquor from Poweet, what do they call it?—they make it from grain and potatoes—"

S'Rella nodded and was gone. Shortly she returned with three bottles of local brandy and an unmarked flask that gave off a pungent, potent smell. "Strong stuff," Maris said. She tasted it herself, then had S'Rella hold up Val's head while she dribbled it into his mouth. He seemed anxious to cooperate, sucking down the drink eagerly as they took turns pouring it into him.

When Raggin finally returned with a healer more than an hour later, Val had passed out. "Here's your healer," the barkeep said. He took one look at the empty bottles on the floor and added, "You'll pay for those too, flyer."

When the healer had set Val's arm and leg—Raggin had been right, it was broken as well, though not as badly—and splinted them, and treated his swollen face, he gave Maris a small bottle full of a dark green liquid. "This is better than brandy," he said. "It will numb the pain and let him sleep." He departed, leaving Maris and S'Rella alone with Val.

"It was flyers, wasn't it?" S'Rella asked tearfully as they sat together in the smoky, candle-lit room.

"One arm and one leg broken, and the other side not touched," Maris said angrily. "Yes, that says flyer to me. I don't think any flyer could have done this personally, but I suspect it was a flyer who had it done." On a sudden impulse Maris moved to where Val's blood-stained, torn clothing had been piled, and rummaged through it. "Hmm. As I thought. His knife is gone. Maybe they took it, or maybe he just had it in his hand and dropped it."

"I hope he cut them, whoever it was," S'Rella said. "Do you think it was Corm? Because Val was going to take his wings tomorrow?"

"Today," Maris said ruefully, glancing toward the window. The first blush of dawn was visible against the eastern sky. "But, no, it wasn't Corm. Not that Corm wouldn't gladly destroy Val if he could, but he'd do it legally, not like this. Corm is too proud to resort to beatings."

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"Who, then?" Her voice quivered.

Maris shook her head. "I don't know, S'Rella. Some sick person, obviously. Maybe a friend of Corm's, or a friend of Ari's. Maybe Arak or one of *his* friends. You know Val made a lot of enemies."

"He wanted me to go with him," S'Rella said, guiltily, "but I went to see Garth instead. If I had gone with him like he wanted, this wouldn't have happened."

"If you had gone with him," Maris said, "you'd probably be lying there broken and bleeding as well. S'Rella, love, remember those rainbirds they left for us. They wanted to tell us something. You're a one-wing too." She glanced out towards the dawn. "And so am I. Maybe it's time I admitted it. I'm half-a-flyer and that's all I'll ever be." She smiled for S'Rella. "But I guess what matters is what half."

S'Rella seemed puzzled, but Maris said, "No more talk. You still have a few hours before the competition opens, and I want you to try to get some sleep. You have to win your wings today, remember?"

"I can't," S'Rella protested. "Not now. I can't."

"Especially now," Maris said. "Whoever had this done to Val would be delighted to know that it lost you your wings as well as his. Is that what you want?"

"No," S'Rella said.

"Then sleep."

Later, when S'Rella slept, Maris looked up again at the window. The sun was half-risen, its reddened face streaked with heavy dark clouds. It was going to be a good, windy day. A fine day for flying.

The competition was already well under way when Maris and S'Rella arrived late. They had been delayed in the tavern when Raggin demanded immediate payment of Val's bill, and it had taken a long argument to convince him that he would get everything due him. Maris made him promise to tend to Val's needs, and allow no one else up those stairs.

Sena was at her usual station by the judges, watching the early contestants fly the gates. Maris sent S'Rella off to join the other woodwingers, and hurried up the cliff. Sena was relieved to see her. "Maris!" she exclaimed. "I was worried something was wrong. It will be time soon. Sher is next up. Is S'Rella ready?"

"S'Rella is ready to fly," Maris said. She told Sena about Val.

All the strength and vitality seemed to drain from the teacher as she listened. Her good eye clouded over with tears and she leaned more heavily on her cane, and suddenly she was very old indeed. "I did not believe," she muttered weakly. "I did not—even when that terrible thing with the birds, even then—I could not think they would do such a thing." Her face was the color of ash. "Help me, child. I must sit down."

Maris put an arm about her for support and led her to the judges' table, where Shalli looked up, concerned.

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"Is everything all right?"

"No," said Maris, easing Sena into a seat. "Val will not fly today," she continued, swinging around to face the judges. "Last night he was attacked and beaten at the tavern where he had a room. An arm and a leg were broken."

All of the judges looked shocked. "How terrible," Shalli said. The Easterner swore, the Outer Islander shook his head, and the Landsman of Skulny rose. "This is dreadful. I won't allow this on my island. We'll find whoever did it, you have my promise on that."

"A flyer did it," Maris said, "or paid for it, anyway. They broke his right arm and his right leg. One-Wing. You understand."

Shalli frowned. "Maris, this is a horrid thing, but no flyer would do such a thing. And if you mean to imply that *Corm* would—"

"Do you have proof a flyer was involved?" the Easterner interrupted.

"I know the tavern where Val One-Wing was staying," the Landsman said. "The Iron Axe, was it not? That is a very bad place, with the worst sort of patrons, rough people. It could have been anyone. A drunken fight, a jealous lover, a gambling quarrel. I've seen many beatings come before me from that place."

Maris stared at him. "You'll never find who did it, no matter what you promise," she said. "That isn't what concerns me. I want to take Val's wings back to him tonight."

"Val's—wings?"

"I'm afraid," the Southerner said, "he must wait and try again next year. I am sorry he was hurt when he was so close to winning."

"Close?" Maris looked the length of the table, found the box she sought, picked it up and rattled it at them. "Nine black stones to one white. That is more than close. Val has won. Even if he lost five to nothing today, he has *won*."

"No," Shalli said stubbornly. "Corm deserves his chance, I won't have you cheat him of it for One-Wing, no matter how sorry I feel for him. Corm is very good at the gates. He might have won ten to nothing, two stones from each of us, and then he would have kept his wings."

"Ten to nothing," Maris said. "How likely is that?"

"It is possible," Shalli said.

"It is," echoed the Easterner. "We can't give the victory to One-Wing. It would not be fair to Corm, who has flown well for many years. I think we must declare Val forfeit."

Heads were bobbing up and down the table, but Maris only smiled. "I was afraid you might take this position." She put her hands on her hips and defied them. "But Val will have his wings. Luckily there is a precedent. You set it yourselves last night, with S'Rella and Garth. Let the score stand and the match continue. Summon Corm immediately.

"*I* will fly proxy for Val."

She knew they would not deny her.

Maris got her wings and joined the

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mill of contestants, impatient and increasingly nervous.

The gates had been erected during the night, nine flimsy wooden constructions planted firmly in the sand, in a course demanding a series of difficult turns and tacking maneuvers. The first gate, straight out from flyers' cliff, consisted of two tall blackwood poles, each some forty feet high, set fifty feet apart in the sand. A rope had been tied from the top of one pole to the top of the other. To score, the flyer had to glide through that gate. Easy enough, but the next gate was only a few yards further down the beach, not straight ahead but off to one side, so the flyer had to angle quickly before shooting past it. And the second gate was smaller, the poles just a little bit shorter and set just a little bit closer together. So it went, the course wandering out into the shallows and then veering sharply back onto land, a twisting wing-snapping course, with each of the nine gates smaller than the one before, until the ninth and final gate, two poles barely eight feet off the ground, set exactly twenty-one feet apart. A flyer's wingspan was twenty feet. No one had ever flown more than seven gates. Even that was no mean task; of all the flyers to try the gates this morning, the best score was six, and that had been flown by the phenomenal Lane.

Challengers traditionally flew first in this test; the flyer was given the courtesy of knowing what score he had to beat. Wings on her shoulders, Maris watched the woodwingers make their attempts, one by one.

Sher dove straight from the cliff through the first gate, coming in barely under the rope, banked sharply towards the second but continued to descend, fast, too fast. Panicking, the young woodwinger leveled off quickly to avoid hitting the ground, and suddenly started to rise, passing over the second gate instead of through it. The flyer that Sher challenged managed only two gates, but that was enough for the victory.

Leya, watching Sher, chose a different strategy. She leapt from the cliff to circle widely above the beach, dropping down gradually so that she'd pass through the first gate level instead of in a descent. She began her turn well before she entered the gate proper, so that she actually swung *around* one pole gracefully, already heading for the second gate. She sailed smoothly through that as well, again beginning her turn early, but this time it was a sharper turn, more demanding, upwind. Leya made it well enough, and the third gate with it, but had nothing left to wrench herself around afterwards. She flew peacefully out to sea, missing the fourth gate by a wide margin. A few of the spectators applauded her anyway, and her flyer rival could only manage two gates before he landed roughly in the sand. So Leya had her first triumph, though it was not enough to win for her a pair of wings.

Damen and Arak were announced by the crier. Both of them had trouble. Damen took the gates too fast,

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and couldn't recover after the second in time for the third. Arak passed through the second gate too high; the upper edge of a wing grazed the rope, and it was enough to send him off balance and far off course. But even with the two-gate tie, Arak easily regained his wings.

Kerr, surprisingly, also managed a tie. Imitating Leya, he entered the first gate levelled and starting his turn, and handled the second easily enough. But like Leya he had trouble veering up-wind into the third, and unlike Leya, he did not manage it. He thumped to a halt in the sand a few yards short of the gate, and the land-bound children rushed in from all sides to help him out of his wings. Jon of Culhal tried to avoid Kerr's fate by maintaining a higher altitude, but passed over and to the right of the third gate.

"*Corm of Lesser Amberly*," the crier was announcing. "*Val One-Wing, Val of South Arren*." Then a brief halt. "*Maris of Lesser Amberly, flying proxy for Val, Maris of Lesser Amberly.*"

She stood on flyers' cliff, helpers unfolding her wings, locking each strut in place. A few dozen yards away, Corm too stood and let them work. She looked over at him, and his eyes met hers, dark, intense. "Maris One-Wing," he called bitterly. "Is this what you've come to? I'm glad Russ is not alive to see you."

"Russ would be proud," she threw back, angry, and knowing Corm had wanted her angry. Anger brought carelessness, and that was his only hope. Seven years ago she had outflown him, in a very different sort of contest where her life and her wings depended on the outcome, and she was confident she could outfly him today as well. Precision, control, reflexes, a feel for the wind; that was all it required, and, today, she had them in full measure.

Her wings were wide and tight, metal humming softly in the wind, and she felt utterly serene and sure of herself. She reached up, wrapped her hands around the grips, ran, jumped, soared. Up she flew, up and up, and she did a loop for the sheer joy of it and then dove, sliding down and down through the air, riding and shifting with the little eddies and currents, angling towards the gates. She was banked sharply and wheeling as she went through the first gate, her wings drawing a silver line from the top of one pole to the bottom of the other, but she stabilized gracefully and swayed the other way for the approach to the second, slid through it fluidly. It was the feel of it, the love of it, not the thought; it was instinct and reflex and knowing the wind, and Maris *was* the wind. The third gate was next, the difficult upwind turn, but she snapped around easily, quickly, cleanly, then looped above the water to correct her angle on the fourth gate, and she was through that too, and the fifth was a wide lazy downwind turn, and the sixth was almost straight ahead, not a difficult angle at all, but small, so she dropped a little and skimmed low over the

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sand, her wings taut and full, and the spectators were shouting and cheering wildly.

In a heartbeat it was over.

Just as the sixth gate loomed ahead of her, she hit a sink, a sudden cold downdraft that had no right being there. It pushed at her, clutched at her, just for an instant, but that was long enough for her wings to brush the ground, and then her legs were trailing through the wet sand and she slid along bumpily before finally jolting to a halt in the shadow of the gate.

A small blond girl ran up to her and helped her to her feet, then began folding up her wings. Maris stood breathless and exhilarated. Five, then, five it was. Not the best score of the day, but a good score, and it was enough. Corm trailed Val by such a margin that it would not be enough for him to beat her. He had to humiliate her, crush her, collect two pebbles from each of the judges. And that he could not do.

He knew it too. Disheartened by her flight, he did not even come close. He failed on the fourth gate, a decisive victory for her, for Val. She felt elated as she trudged across the beach, wings folded on her back.

Criers' calls ran up and down the shore. S'Rella stood poised on the precipice, the sun shining off the bright metal of her wings, and behind her Maris glimpsed wiry, black-haired Jirel of Skulny.

S'Rella leaped, and Maris stood to watch, her heart flying with her, hoping, hoping. S'Rella banked and circled, a leisurely approach instead of the wild rush Maris had employed, and came gliding down smoothly on the same tack Leya and Kerr had used in their turns. Through the first gate, turning, leveling, wheeling now in the opposite direction—Maris felt her breath stop for a minute—and through the second gate, and now a *very* sharp turn upwind, a clean knife-thrust of a turn as if the wind itself had changed direction at her command, and through the third gate, still in control, and another hard veer and she was through the fourth gate—people began to rise and cheer—and the fifth was as easy for her as it had been for Maris, and now it was the sixth that she was moving in on, the sixth on which Maris had failed, and her wings were swaying a bit but then they stilled and she came in higher than Maris, and the sink shook her and didn't ground her, and then she was through the *sixth* gate too—shouts and cheers everywhere—and the seventh demanded a split-second bank at just the right angle, and S'Rella did that as well, and she came around towards the eighth—

—and it was too narrow, the poles set too close together, and S'Rella was just a bit too far to one side. Her left wing hit the pole with a snap, and the wing-struts shattered even as the pole did, and S'Rella went sprawling on the ground.

And Maris was only one of dozens running toward her.

When she got there, S'Rella was sitting up, laughing and breathing hard,

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surrounded by land-bound who were shouting at her, yelling hoarse-voiced congratulations. The children pressed close to touch her wings. But S'Rella, her face reddened by the wind, couldn't seem to stop laughing.

Maris pushed her way through the crowd and hugged her, and S'Rella giggled through it all. "Are you all right?" Maris asked, pushing her away and holding her at arm's length. S'Rella nodded furiously, still giggling. "Then what...?"

S'Rella pointed at her wing, the wing that had struck the gate. The fabric, virtually indestructible, was damaged, but a support strut had broken. "That's easily fixed," Maris said after she'd looked it over. "No problem."

"Don't you *see*?" S'Rella said, jumping to her feet. Her right wing bobbed with the motion, taut and vibrant, but her left hung limp and broken, silver tissue dragging on the sand where she fell.

Maris looked and began to laugh. "One Wing," she said helplessly and they collapsed into each other's arms again laughing.

"Jurel didn't disgrace you," Maris said to Garth that night, as she sat with him by his fire. He was up and about again, looking better, and drinking ale once more. "She was an admirable proxy, flew five gates as good as I'd done. But five isn't seven, of course, and it wasn't enough. Even the Landsman couldn't call it a tie."

"Good," Garth said. "S'Rella deserves the wings. I like S'Rella. Make her promise to visit me too."

Maris smiled. "I will," she said. "She's sorry she couldn't come tonight, but she wanted to go straight down to Val. I'm to join her after I leave here. I don't relish it, but..." She sighed.

Garth took a healthy swig of ale and stared into the fire for a long moment. "I feel sorry for Corm," he said. "Never liked him, but he knew how to fly." He took another long swallow.

"Don't fret," Maris said. "He's bitter, but he'll recover. Shalli's pregnancy will soon be too advanced for her to fly, so Corm will have the use of her wings for a few months, and if I know him he'll bully her into sharing even after the baby comes. Next year he can challenge. It won't be Val, either. Corm is cleverer than that. I'll wager he names someone like Jon of Culhall."

"Ah," Garth said, "if the damned healers ever cure me, I just may name Jon myself."

"He'll be a popular choice next year," Maris agreed. "Even Kerr wants another chance at him, though I doubt Sena will sponsor him again until he's a lot more seasoned. She'll have better prospects to choose from next year. With the double victory by S'Rella and Val, Woodwings is suddenly thriving again. She'll soon have more students than she knows what to do with." Maris chuckled. "You and Corm weren't the only flyers grounded either. Bari of Poweet lost her wings in an out-of-family challenge,

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and Big Hara went down to her own daughter."

"A flock of ex-flyers," Garth grumbled.

"And a lot of one-wings," Maris added, smiling. "The world is changing, Garth. Once we had only flyers and land-bound."

"Yes," Garth said, gulping down some more ale. "Then you confused everything. Flying land-bounds and grounded flyers. Where will it end?"

"I don't know," Maris said. She stood up. "I'd stay longer, but I must go talk to Val, and I'm long overdue on Amberly. With Shalli pregnant and Corm wingless, the Landsman will no doubt work me to death. But I'll find time to visit, I promise."

"Good." He grinned up at her. "Fly well, now."

When she left, he was shouting to Riesa for another ale.

Val was propped up awkwardly in bed, his head raised just enough so that he could eat, and he was spooning soup into his mouth with his left hand. S'Rella sat by his side, holding the bowl. They both looked up when Maris entered, and Val's hand trembled, spilling hot soup on his bare chest. He cursed and S'Rella helped him mop it up.

"Val," Maris said evenly, nodding. On the floor by the door she set the wings she had carried, once belonging to Corm of Lesser Amberly. "Your wings."

The swelling in his face had subsided enough so that Val was beginning to look like himself again, although his puffed lip gave him an atypical sneer. "S'Rella told me what you did," he said with difficulty. "Now I suppose you want me to thank you."

Maris folded her arms and waited.

"Your friends the flyers did this to me, you know," he said. "If the bones mend crooked, I'll never use those damn wings you got me. Even if they heal properly, I'll never be as good as I was."

"I know that," Maris said, "and I'm sorry. But it wasn't my friends who did this, Val. Not all flyers are my friends. And they aren't all your enemies."

"You were at the party," Val said.

Maris nodded. "It won't be easy, and most of the burden is on you. Reject them if you like, hate all of them. Or find the ones worth knowing. It's up to you."

"I'll tell you who I'm going to find," Val said. "I'm going to find the ones who did this to me, and then I'm going to find whoever sent them."

"Yes," Maris said. "And then?"

"S'Rella found my knife," Val said simply. "I dropped it in the bushes last night. But I cut one of them, well enough so I'll know her by the scar."

"Where are you going, when you heal?" Maris said.

Val seemed thrown off-stride by the sudden change of subject. "I had thought Seatooth. I've heard the stories, about how much the Landsman there wants a flyer. But S'Rella tells me that the Landsman of Skulny is anxious as well. I'll talk to them

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both, see what they offer."

"Val of Seatooth," Maris said. "It has a nice sound to it."

"It will always be One-Wing," he said. "Maybe for you too."

"A half-flyer," she agreed. "Both of us. But which half? Val, you can make the Landsman bid for your services. The flyers will despise you for it, most of them, and maybe some of the younger and greedier will imitate you, and I'd hate to see that. And you can wear that knife your father gave you when you fly, even though you break one of the oldest and wisest flyer laws by doing so. It is a small point, a tradition, and the flyers again will despise you, but no one will do anything. But I tell you now, if you find who ordered you beaten, and kill them with that same knife, you'll be One-Wing no longer. The flyers will name you outlaw and strip your wings away, and not a Landsman on Windhaven will take your side or give you landing, no matter how much they need flyers."

"You want me to forget," Val said. "Forget *this*?"

"No," said Maris. "Find them, and take them to a Landsman, or call a flyer court. Let your enemy be the one who loses wings and home and life, and not you. Is that such a bad alternative?"

Val smiled crookedly, and Maris saw he had lost some teeth as well. "No," he said. "I almost like it."

"It's your choice," Maris said. "You won't be flying for a good while, so you'll have time to think about it. I think you're intelligent enough to use that time." She looked to S'Rella. "I must return to Lesser Amberly. It's on your way, if you're going back to Southern. Will you fly with me, and spend a day in my home?"

S'Rella nodded eagerly. "Yes, I'd love—that is, if Val will be all right."

"Flyers have unlimited credit," Val said. "If I promise Raggin enough iron, he'll nurse me better than my own parent."

"I'll go then," S'Rella said. "But I'll see you again, Val, won't I? We both have wings now."

"Yes," Val said. "Go fly with yours. I'll look at mine."

S'Rella kissed him and crossed the room to where Maris stood. They started out the door.

"Maris!" Val called sharply.

She turned at the sound of his voice, in time to see his left hand reach awkwardly behind his head, under the pillow, and come whipping out with frightening speed. The long blade sliced through the air and struck the doorframe not a foot from Maris' head. But the knife was ornamental obsidian, bright and black and sharp, but not resilient, and it shattered when it struck.

Maris must have looked terrified; Val was smiling. "It was never my father's," he said. "My father never owned anything. I stole it from Arak." Across the room their eyes met, and Val laughed painfully. "Get rid of it for me, will you, One-Wing?"

Maris smiled and bent to pick up the pieces. ■

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Richard Anderson

TETHERBALL

THOMAS A. EASTON

Regulations are necessary, of course. But beware of pushing the regulee too far . . .

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ington; Thousands Dr

FIRST MARSMEN ON THEIR WAY

agrange Colony Madison, 20 March 2078 (IP)—At 4 AM Greenwich Mean Time the sixteen men and women of Mars Probe I boarded their Mars Transit Module and embarked for the Red Planet.

Commander Nils Johnson's last words before the hatch closed were, "We'll see you all in four years." The ungainly bulk of the MTM was then eased out of Madison's Assembly Hold and its fusion-powered ion engines were fired for the second time in history. This firing was no test. The MTM was on its way, beginning mankind's first real step into space.

The MTM will orbit Mars seventeen months from now. It will remain in orbit while its crew descends to the surface in the two landers now attached to the MTM's flanks. The landingsite—already tentatively named Marsport I—has not yet been selected, but once it has it will be the location of mankind's first settlement on another world. This base will be constructed of prefabricated modules to be shipped over the next few months. These modules, along with supplies for the fifteen month stay on Mars and for the return trip, will be sent in a series of six high-acceleration cargo crafts, only one of which will orbit Mars. This one will contain the supplies for the return trip. The other five will land at Marsport I,

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beginning a week before the explorers descend to occupy the site.

The Mars Probe crew includes eight women and eight men. There are only two married couples aboard. Commander Johnson's wife Maj is the expedition's medical officer. Peter and Sarah Wilcox are....

UN CONGRATULATES INDUSTRY ON MARS PROBE I

New York, 22 March 2078 (API)—Secretary Pyotr Kvelechev, speaking for all members of the United Nations, offered the world's congratulations to the unique consortium of industries that this week launched the first manned expedition to another world.

The leading members of the twenty-member consortium are Western Electric (well known for its null-G semiconductor factories and power satellites), General Crystals (solid-state electronics), and MoonBased Extractions (raw materials for satellite factories).

Speaking before the General Assembly, Secretary Kvelechev said, "In an age of caution, when no nation on Earth is willing to invest in glory, when basic research is withering for lack of support, when conservation of investments and lives is the watchword, it is refreshing to see the race reach out for new frontiers. The Mars Consortium has the good wishes of every government and every citizen of Planet Earth. Its explorers carry the hearts and hopes of a world, and people everywhere are eagerly anticipating their discoveries."

Excerpt of Minutes, Meeting of MarsCon Directorate, 30 March 2078:

Evans, MBE: It's all thumbs up. They're right on track, and all we have to do is wait.

Lopez, ArgenFac: Not all. We still have to get the cargo modules off. Is everything thumbs up on that?

Evans, MBE: Samuels?

Samuels, BritMin: All six are loaded and ready. Lined up like planes on a runway, just waiting for someone to punch the button.

Evans, MBE: And we'll punch the first one in three weeks. Nothing can stop us now.

OSHA HANDBOOK REVISED

Washington, D.C., 2 April 2078 (API)—The U.S. Government Printing Office has just released the long-awaited new edition of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's handbook of industrial safety regulations. Titled "Federal Legal Requirements for the Safety and Health of Personnel, Third Edition," it consolidates all previous regulations for U.S. employers on the ground and in space. OSHA Assistant Director Richard Milhaus McReady said, "The consolidation is designed to facilitate interpretation of the rules and to eliminate the double standard that has for so long prevailed between space and ground."

As an example of consolidation, Mr. McReady pointed to Rule 51c(a)(2) and said, "For years we have had separate requirements that tools and other equipment always be tethered to satellites and to the frames of Earth-side

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construction projects. This one rule replaces the previous redundancy with a single statement that all equipment in use outside a structure be tethered to the structure."

As an example of the double standard, he remarked that, "We have never before extended the Earth-side noise and pollution control regulations to space, but now all spacecraft will be required to muffle their exhausts. Our tests have shown that rocket engines far exceed all the tolerances written into the law. Testimony gathered during the revision process also showed that satellites and spacecraft are habitually guilty of releasing large quantities of waste gases and liquids to their environment. This will no longer be permitted in space, any more than it is permitted on Earth."

Mr. McReady was unsympathetic to one observer who pointed out both that there is no sound in space and that space is a limitless sink for wastes. "We *cannot* have life on the colony satellites continually disrupted by sonic booms and the like," he said. "And as for space being limitless, we thought the same of the Earth once. Now we know better, don't we?"

MAINE SUES OSHA

Augusta, Maine, 3 April 2078 (API) — The Maine State Highway Department has filed suit in Federal District Court here for an exemption to Rule 51c(a)(2) of the revised OSHA handbook. A spokesperson said, "There is no sense whatsoever to requiring the tools used in highway construction to be tethered to the highway. Where can they fall to? We fully expect other states to join our suit, as well as the builders of single-family dwellings and other low-rises."

OI DEFIES OSHA

Houston, Texas, 3 April 2078 (API) —Orbital Inserts, Inc., the nation's largest provider of ground-to-orbit transportation, has reacted to OSHA's new rocket muffler rule with the succinct comment that, "They can sit on it." Vice-President Frederick Hermann expanded on his initial reaction to this reporter's question by saying, "Someone in Washington has no understanding of physics. If they insist, we *will* have to pay fines on take-off and landing. But I think the courts will support us if we in turn insist that OSHA's inspectors take their readings of all in-orbit noise from outside the spacecraft."

MEMO: R.M. McReady to Enforcement Division, 5 April 2078:

In examining the MarsCon Project Scheduling Reports, I have come to the conclusion that their unmanned cargo modules are equipment within the purview of Rule 51c(a)(2). Thus they must be tethered to Lagrange Colony Madison as long as they are outside the Colony. Please relay this ruling to the MarsCon Directorate immediately.

Excerpt of Minutes, Meeting of MarsCon Directorate, 7 April 2078:

Ketchum, WE: It wasn't so bad when they issued the first handbook,

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back when we were building our Factor I. They knew they didn't understand what we were doing.

Levesque, GC: But now! Space is so ordinary, so much a part of the world, they think they know it all. Sunshades on our scooters! To protect our men from the sun!

Ketchum, WE: And coolie hats on our satellite repairmen. Straw ones, yet, because down *here* it makes sense.

Levesque, GC: Don't they know what a spacesuit is for?

Evans, MBE: Enough, gentlemen. We should save our private complaints for other meetings, no matter how costly they are. Here, we have just one joint problem.

Lopez, ArgenFac: Goddamn tethers!

Evans, MBE: We cannot persuade OSHA to change their mind. They are adamant that all unmanned, nonsatellite constructions are equipment. They have given us two alternatives—tether the cargo modules, all the way to Mars, or man them.

Ketchum, WE: And we can do neither. The one is ridiculous, and the other is impossible. No one could survive the acceleration!

Lopez, ArgenFac: Besides which, the life support would mean too few supplies could make the trip.

Ketchum, WE: We could always ask for volunteers to ride the things in spacesuits.

Evans, MBE: No. That is out of the question. Not only would it mean murder on our part, but it would also reduce payload.

Lopez, ArgenFac: Then you'd better find an answer soon. If those modules don't get off on time, the expedition won't make it.

Samuels, BritMin: Too true. But who's in charge of the actual operations? After all, we just make policy, don't we?

Levesque, GC: Right. He's your man, isn't he, Evans?

Evans, MBE: Jason Cartwright. He's the project engineer, yes. But he's not a negotiator, even it if was his job to talk OSHA around. He's likely to just cut the tether and launch. And then the rest of the modules will never go. OSHA will have them under lock and key.

MARSCON IMPOTENT—MCREADY ADAMANT

Washington, D.C., 7 April 2078 (API)—The consortium behind Mars Probe I reports that it has been unable to persuade OSHA to suspend the requirements for tethers or crews on the Mars Probe cargo shipments. General Crystals' Alain Levesque said earlier today that if the cargo cannot be launched, the Mars Probe crew will die shortly after reaching Mars. "They have supplies only for the trip there," he said. "They are counting on us to have their next meal waiting for them when they arrive. Their reserves are very slim."

OSHA Assistant Director R.M. McReady, when told of this statement, remarked, "That cuts no ice with me. Rules are rules. They cannot be ignored or suspended at a whim. Perhaps MarsCon would have been wiser to

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ship all the supplies with the crew."

MEMO: J. Cartwright, Project Engineer, to all divisions, Mars Probe Support, 9 April 2078:

We're up against it, folks. The feds won't let us launch as presently planned. They insist on the impossible, but that's bureaucrats for you. And we have to find a solution.

So—all division heads report to my office at 1600 today. We'll have a go at straightening this mess out.

From THE CLAIR VOYANT (Washington gossip column), 12 April 2078:

What is Jason Cartwright, MarsCon project engineer, doing on Earth this week? Could it have anything to do with the monkey wrench OSHA threw into his favorite dream? Does the new cargo module he's ordered mean anything? A week seems awfully short to fit it out for a crew to accompany the supply shipments. And could it possibly work to tether six unmanned craft to one manned one?

FLASH FLOOD SWAMPS WASHINGTON

Washington, D.C., 19 April 2078 (API)—The nation's capital was today stricken by tragedy. At 3:10 PM, the Potomac River left its banks and sent a tidal wave through the city's streets. Damage estimates are not yet available, but city officials reportedly expect the loss of life and property to be large. The cause of the flood is so far unknown, but Mayor Humphrey Jackson said, "This is not a natural thing. Rivers do not act like that. Someone did it to us, and I will have that treasonous bastard's hide!...."

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MARS CARGO ON WAY

Lagrange Colony Madison, 20 April 2078 (IP)—The first Mars Probe supply shipment launched today on schedule and as planned....

MALI BOOMS

Bamako, Mali, 20 April 2078 (API)—A MarsCon spokesman announced this morning that each of MarsCon's twenty member companies will shortly be moving their headquarter offices to this city, the capital of an increasingly prosperous nation. The only explanation for the move was "Having all these

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companies based in one location will improve coordination on future projects such as the Mars Probe." No specific future projects were mentioned....

DEATH TOLL TOPS 3000

Washington, D.C., 20 April 2078 (API)—At least 2000 tourists are now known to have died here yesterday, drowned in the sudden rising of the Potomac River's waters. Most of them were here to view the annual display of Washington's cherry blossoms.

Over 1000 local residents also died as the flood swept through streets, homes, shops, and restaurants. Many were lost as three floating restaurants moored to the river bank sank.

According to one survivor, "It all happened in a flash. One minute I was cruising along, watching the tourists, the next something fell out of the sky and the spray started flying. A god-awful great splash, and the tourists just flew. So did I, but my seat harness kept me from being banged up too much. I came to on top of a city bus three blocks away...."

Experts are now analyzing reports to determine what it was that "fell out of the sky," although they are not confident that all the reports are to be trusted. Some witnesses claimed to have heard an explosion under the river before the wave appeared. Presidential Science Advisor Rodney Malcom says "We are already sure it was not a meteorite, or the damage would have been much greater, and no planes or satellites are missing. Frankly, the explosion theory seems more likely, and that may mean a renewal of terrorist activity. More than that we cannot say." The full extent of the damage is not yet known, but it includes two miles of riverbank landscaping and will probably exceed one billion dollars.

MEMO: J. Cartwright, Project Engineer, to J. Evans, Vice-President, MBE, 21 April 2078:

Well, Joe, we did it. And we made it back here to Madison in time for Monday's successful launch. There should be no problem with the rest of the launches, either, now that OSHA is out of our hair.

I must say, the scheme did a lot more damage than I expected, but I'm not coming forward to admit anything and I've told Ben Jaekel, my recreation director, who came up with the idea, to keep it the hell off his vita.

The cargo module arrived as ordered, right in front of the OSHA HQ building's main entrance on Sunday afternoon, fully fueled and with a mile of six-inch cable. We wired up the terminal destruct charge, wrapped one end of the cable around the pillars on OSHA's portico, and hitched the other end to the module. Then we took the copter up a couple of hundred feet and launched. I let Jaekel push the button, and as he mashed his finger down, I heard him mutter, "Tethers! I'll show them tethers!"

Anyway, by the time the module reached the end of the cable it was doing a good 900 klicks. Between that and its mass, it brought the building down

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and snapped the cable. And then it spun out of control into the Potomac. Unfortunately, that's when the side effects showed up. We didn't anticipate that—perhaps we should have—but it did add to the confusion.

OSHA may never sort out its records from the rubble, and even if they do, they'll take long enough for us to finish the supply shipments.

By the way, I have some great snap shots. ■

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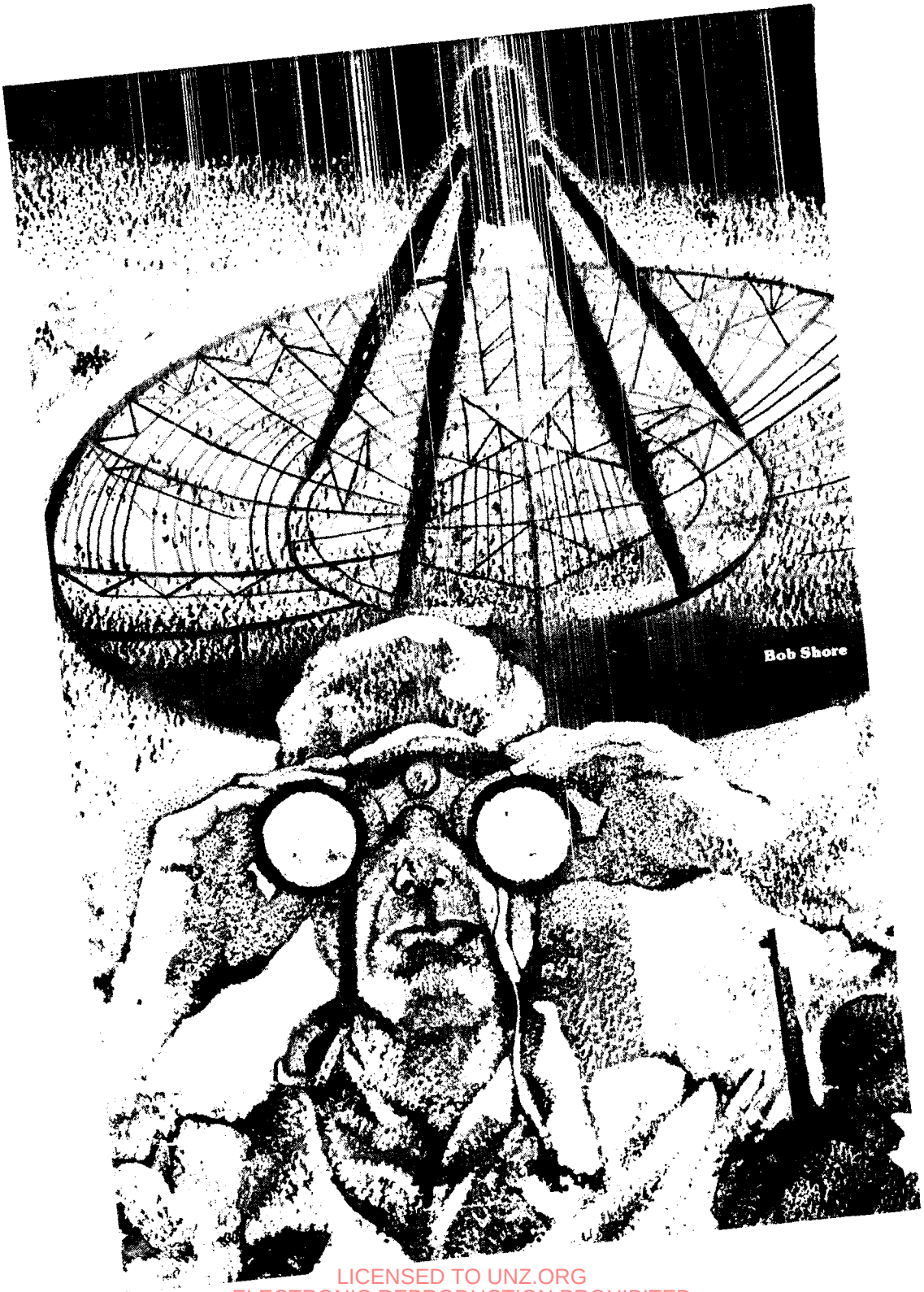

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We've all become pretty used to change. But has that made us more ready to face something really new—or less?

My Mary, social but tolerant, used to josh that I was a seven-days-a-year hermit.

She was right. For fifty-one weeks my life centered around her, our Ronnie and Joannie, and the textiles industry. I included a family vacation. Then I was off, out of the city somewhere, alone.

This was part of the chain of circumstances which brought me into first-line contact with What Has Happened. Most of the other links remain hidden and hide-puckering; we can only speculate about their motives, history and preparation. Otherwise, though, there was an element of lottery; a few individuals out of our Earth's huge population had to get involved early. I was one.

Just this September, over bridge, Jack Parsons urged me:

"Lois and I want you to try our shack this year, Arnie."

So that was another link.

"It's everything you like, Arn," Lois joined in. "And it's only a few hours drive away. Woods, a lake, a good stream. And quiet. Besides, the big, new Research Station is only three kilometers from the shack—for atmosphere." Lois laughed—a bit nervously, I thought.

I knew what she meant. According to reports, they even had a large dish-antenna at that installation. For space-probe contact? Weapons experiments? Or just as another radio-telescope?...

But the main, current effort at the Station seemed to be toward making fusion-power fully practical at last. Nuclear-fusion is a lot less treacherous than fission; floods of energy have to be applied—with multiple laser-beams, streams of accelerated particles, or whatever they use—just to establish the millions of degrees of heat, and the equivalent of the pressures, which exist at the sun's core, to get the hydrogen isotopes, deuterium and/or tritium, to fuse into helium at all. If that heavy input is broken off, or even falls below a critical level, the whole fusion-process stops, dead, useless and harmless.

The trick had been done often and quite well, lately, with a fair net-yield of fusion-energy—output exceeding input by a considerable ratio. The problem now was to improve that ratio, simplify the necessary-condition-sustaining and other equipment, and make it all entirely safe, so that John Public and Family would neither squawk about their electrical bills, nor worry unduly.

Jack and Lois Parsons had mentioned the high-tension lines leading inside the lofty, steel-mesh fence of the Station, no doubt to provide electricity for the experimental work.

Mary, my wife, was mildly interested in all these rather incidental

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details, too. She's a cool-headed woman. She chuckled her joke about my one-week annual habit of hermitry, and then added:

"I'm glad the kids are upstairs, asleep. This time, Ronnie would be wild to drop school and go along!"

Yes, my eldest, aged nine, was, even then, one of the numerous smallfry who lived for the Future. And why not? Wasn't that where we were headed, if we survived? With survey-camp domes already on the Moon? With prototype space-habitations—great cylinders, rotating to provide centrifugal gravity for the gardens and bold persons trying out a new way of life on the inner curves—while these structures hovered between Luna and Earth? With brief, personnelled landings on Mars accomplished? With crewed, close-study labs to orbit the sulfurous, hell-hole planet, Venus, in prospect? With thumb-size computers getting common? Why not, indeed?

I accepted what was coming in a casual manner, with a small fraction of my awareness. I thought I was attuned to it all. But, like countless others, I wasn't. Not really.

"Good friends," I laughed to the Parsons. "I'm an old-fashioned guy, just craving water and wilderness. Never mind the super-gimmicks. I accept the loan of your hideaway with deepest thanks. . . ."

Their "shack" turned out to be a nice summer-cottage, better than ours, out at Heron Creek. The inside smelled faintly of books, furniture, pine-boards and moth-flakes—plus a curious, dry, chilly pungence which, since I was off-guard, I thought of only as part of solitude and October.

My brain was relaxed. The afternoon sun was on the forest; the breezes blew. I forgot that that Research Station existed.

I didn't yet know that an eerie uneasiness had crept into this primal setting. That men were already on watch for Something on the Loose; they couldn't have said what.

I moved my bag, my fishing tackle and so forth, and the groceries I had bought in the nearest town from the car into the house. I was in the yard, and was fussing with my .22-rifle, when somebody came from among the trees to check up on me. A stick cracked, and I pivoted, alert.

The man said, "Hi!" genially, but gave me the gimlet-once-over. His leaf-green coveralls legs were turned up over his boots. His hair was in tight, gray ringlets down the back of his neck. Maybe he was fifty—fifteen years older than I. He looked athletic and woodsy, maybe booksy, too.

He wore a badge. United States Government was engraved across its top. The S.P.P. I translated as Special Project Police. I remembered the Station, guessing that he was one of its perimeter-guards; there would always be various types of person inimical to its sort of activities, so there was reason for precautions.

"Sorry for being neighborly so fast," he apologized. "But, for one thing—if you stay at all—you and I will be the only people living here for

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all of two kilometers around."

He was soft spoken, yet in that elusive way that hides sharp steel in a velvet scabbard. I sensed that he kept judging me, though I wasn't a saboteur, nor a man with any other furious mission. And I certainly wasn't damaging this pristine environment; he might be particular about that; individuals associated with procedures that might harm surroundings have learned in recent years to compensate by conservation.

Further, I had nothing about myself to be ashamed of; I'm big, dark as the forest, fairly rugged. Finally he sprung a test; he grinned, winked, picked up a chip, and tossed it in the air.

The .22 was loaded, and I fired almost by reflex. The chip spun the other way. I've hung onto some tricks from my kid-days in Iowa.

"Nice shot—with a small rifle—not even a scatter-gun," the man remarked. "But if anything jumped me, I'd rather have a knife."

"What kind of leg-pull is that?" I demanded sharply.

His smile reassured, but he was still studying me. At last he said:

"Call it random philosophy that slipped out." He seemed to hesitate, before continuing. "I suppose you want to get settled. But if you crave company anytime, come up over the ridge to my hut, and we'll split a beer. Anyhow I'll see you before nightfall. The name's Landell."

"Mine's Crobert," I tossed after him. I kind of liked the guy, even though his talk was roundabout.

I chose the daybed in the room with the books and the fireplace, unpacked sketchily, and swept out what I figured was all chipmunkmess, which most of it was. They will get in! The stuff was just torn bits of paper, dried grass, hoarded seeds and wild-cherry pits, and droppings, as far as I truly noticed. But I think a couple of larger flakes that looked different—grayish and odd—almost got through to my full attention.

I wrote my thanks to the Parsons, and was halfway through an arrival letter to Mary, when I heard a dim, purring roar, almost too slow in cyclic rate for human ears. It came from far off, and continued for what seemed about a minute. After a brief silence, it started up again. Now, I timed it by my wristwatch. Yes—exactly sixty seconds—obviously a controlled interval; they were making some sort of test at the Research Station. There was a longer pause, until a third and final run—a precise two minutes.

I suppose I shrugged. That dim, purring roar was nothing very new. I felt blasé. But for my kid, Ronnie, lost in his play-visioning of human heroes manipulating—just for example—the mighty forces generated in the guts of stars, the effect would have been different. He would have been big-eyed with rapture just to hear such sounds directly from their source, instead of as part of a newscast. Though, I needed my few days away by myself, I more than half regretted that he wasn't with me just then.

In another manner, too, I felt

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lonesome now. It was almost sundown. I went outside, meaning to find Landell's place. Matters unspoken behind his conversation kept bothering me. But I spied him sitting way up on a rock ledge of the ridge, his booted feet spraddled out before him.

"Follow the path up, Crobert," he hailed, with a wave of his arm.

That took time and wind.

"Looking around?" I panted, grinning at him.

"Partly. Do you care to add a guess or two?"

He had binoculars. But purpose can go deeper than the obvious. Besides, there was a mood of eternity up here. Even the big, twisted pine behind him looked like centuries of battling storms, crystallized into triumph.

"Think—be aware?" I half kidded.

Landell's pale eyes lighted. "Sounds like fun," he said. "Of what the world was like, those many millions of years back? Of Coal Period swamps—then dinosaurs? Of fierce, scared dawn-men, trying to understand their environment?"

"Could be," I answered. We had both turned whimsically serious.

"Once there was no knowledge for such awareness," Landell continued. "Primitive humans didn't have any modern learning—about geological history, of about the causes of lightning, earthquake, disease, life and death. But they still had to try to allay their fears, and to seek out some comfort, and a place for themselves, in—and a kind of comprehension of—their universe. At least, that's how I figure it must have been. Lacking the means for discovering physical truths, they had to fall back on fantasy. So they invented explanations in the form of little gods and demons."

"We descendants have come a long way," I commented, proud of our superior wisdom. "We've probed, studied, experimented, with all sorts of apparatus. We have thrown out ideas that have proven wrong. We've been identifying the facts."

Landell's wry chuckle made me feel like a youngster talking too big. For a moment he peered intently through his binoculars at a nearby, tree-clad mountain. I had crouched down beside him.

"Um—the scientific method—eh, Crobert?" he laughed, as with mild sarcasm. "Once the world was flat; now it's round, for instance?...And still a long stretch to go—down to just what makes flesh alive, and out to infinity?...I'm not so sure, Friend, that we're so far ahead of our remote ancestors.... We've had—still have—our devils. Anything half-known, unseen, unfelt, strange—and—like the invisible fiends that once represented cholera and bubonic plague—very dangerous. Demons named Atom and Radiation continue to linger somewhat, with our modern selves. More recently, another, called Microwaves, has been added—ever since that means has been used to transmit energy down from solar-power plants in space, to a few, small, carefully-chosen receptor-areas on the ground. Only by wise, certainly justified, and

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exhaustive caution—reducing hazard to virtually zero—we hear—have we calmed our—what? Valid concern? Or superstitions?... In the perhaps over-hunger of our culture for what it takes to run its crescendoing gadgetry?... And now—something quite different. Maybe. Though half anticipated—"

Landell's words stopped. But, after a few seconds, just as abruptly, he flung a jagged question at me:

"Crobert—are you religious?"

"Some," I replied.

"I am," he told me. "Once I thought I was an atheist. But such militant negativism stumbles over enigma even in a grassblade. Not that I go much for the anthropomorphism of a Fierce, Kindly Old Gent someplace out there. Anyhow, I decided that abstract science didn't deny religion, but could provide a better approach to the same thing, explaining the universe to mankind, and helping to give it peace, reverence and a code to live by, and bringing it a little closer to Whatever It Is That Makes The Works Go. Some will still call this a weak, emotional crutch. But—for myself—once in a while, when my assurances blur up a bit, I'm prompted to lean."

We were silent a while. I could sense Landell's passive alertness. Also, more strongly than ever, that his rambling remarks were leading me somewhere.

There was a tiny clatter in the quiet.

"A chip of stone, bouncing down the rocks," I said absently.

"Yuh," Landell grunted. "Sounds can often tell us what's happening—if they're familiar. Whether it's raining outdoors, from the noise of tires on the street. We might gauge a dog's size and mood from the shuffle of its paw-pads on a sidewalk at night. Just now we recognized an object's nature, smallness and change of position from the vibrations it produced in the atmosphere. But what caused it to fall was not revealed. A gust of wind, maybe?... And some sounds are hard to read. Even what one sees with his eyes can be wrongly interpreted, if background-experience is lacking."

"Hey!" I challenged. "What are you doing? Telling spooky yarns?"

Landell snorted lightly at that. "Could be, Crobert. Maybe I should lay off."

We were silent again. The sun had just gone down, putting the uneven, forested scene—except the higher mountains—in blue shadow. I looked across the little valley below, and up into the red-fringed, early October sky. There I saw the pale spark of a planet, beginning to be visible.

"Venus," I pronounced, perhaps because all distant things seemed to fit in with the vague unease that was tweaking my hide.

But then I went on, in a lighter, relieving, matter-of-fact vein:

"Once it was just the beautiful love-star. Then it was believed to be a super tropical world of Carboniferous Age jungles. But later all its intriguing mystery was found out and spoiled. Surface heat of more than five hundred de-

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grees, Celsius. A hundred atmospheres of pressure, built up by the weight of carbon dioxide gas, and vapors of various sulfur compounds. No life could emerge from such conditions."

"Hm-m—probably not," Landell agreed. "But do we truly know? Venus keeps on being extensively probed—yes. Yet the effectiveness of instruments must often be limited by that harsh environment. Besides, that planet is almost as big as Earth—lots of territory to cover, to find out everything. Further, are we sure we understand how its corrosive—chemically very active—atmosphere stays that way, instead of reaching some neutral status? What if its shifting, restless chemical energy had sometime begun to produce more and more complex and exotic molecules, capable of a different sort of metabolism—life—compatible with its native habitat? And who's to say it couldn't get smart enough to invent things—maybe even means to leave its natal ambiance, just as people go into the deep sea in diving gear, or into space in vacuum suits? Thus, mightn't it affect us, on Earth, directly? All these thoughts are very old, of course."

A gust of evening wind through the conifers of these minor heights, caused a lonesome whisper to flow into the quiet, as Landell stopped talking. Until, with a slight shift of mental attitude, though in a half-kidding manner, I carried the conversation onward, myself:

"Could be, Landell.... As for Mars, it has been entirely fotomapped, and some of its surface explored by mobile devices. Live men and women have even left their bootprints in its red dust in a few places. It is somewhat too far from the sun to have comfortable temperatures. Its low gravity—only 0.38-G—allowed most of its atmosphere to leak into space. The reasonable opinion is that any biological era it may have had, couldn't have lasted long enough for intelligence to evolve. Still, it *does* have, at least, an oddly intense soil chemistry. And, though smaller than the Earth, it *is* vast! Only a very few of its 144 million square kilometers have been visited by anything of human origin. So a lot could still be hidden. In several places there are straight-line trenches and other geometric markings. Strangest of all, there are those groupings of three-sided, pyramidal formations, that were first clearly photographed from orbiters, way back in the 1970's. Since then, they've been climbed over, and dug into a bit, by live landing parties that still couldn't explain them. If they aren't the freak results of wind and dust erosion and drifting—which seems a doubtful theory, considering how very regular their forms are—who or what, from where and when, made them—and why?"

"I see I'm not the only one who has been reading up, Crobert," Landell chuckled. He exhaled heavily, before amending:

"Then comes the old question of what Jupiter, Saturn and the other Gas Giants might have brewed up of different biology—even sentient com-

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plexity—in their unreached depths? Finally, there are the planets of the stars. Among so very many, there's got to be....As everybody has heard a thousand times."

"Sure," I said. "Yet other beings in quite a few places is a mathematical certainty. Hard for some folks to realize, though. And still—uh—veiled from us. Nothing like people, probably—from a separate evolutionary start. Even on a similar world."

"That's the regular notion, anyhow," Landell responded rather dryly. "In any case, how like us, or different from us, could those various, not-quite-imaginable ones be? Some moving upright? Others prone and crawling? Silly speculations? Who knows? Maybe more important, how would they think? Would their psychology even be comparable with our own? If they used tools and machines, what would such artifacts look like?"

"They'd know fundamental shapes," I offered. "Squares, spheres, triangles. And that five and five make ten, anywhere."

"I suppose, Crobert. But would they necessarily even have similar senses? If you knew nothing of eyes, could you conceive of vision?"

"Uh-huh—it all gets lost in a frustrating fog, doesn't it?"

"So—might be—we should drop the subject for now, Crobert."

"Down in my borrowed cottage, I've got a steak to share," I invited.

Landell smirked at me in the twilight. "Thanks. Only there are jobs that I have to do," he answered.

He eyed me for an intense moment, still trying to size me up. Then, suddenly, incomprehensibly, he asked:

"Do you have any allergies, Crobert? Since arriving here, have you felt any unusual urge to sneeze? Or to scratch?"

"No allergies that I know of," I said. "Nor any symptoms....Hey—what the hell?!..."

"It was just a dumb, groping query, Crobert," Landell responded, almost easily. "But I thought.... If any human comes into contact with ambient traces that are truly out of the ordinary....Don't let our blabble affect your nerves too much, Crobert ....Though the way you've followed along with things I've said—also bringing up points on your own that urged me on—suggests that you're more than usually attuned and ready—if you can take the actual possibility, itself....Look—if you'd itched or anything, I was going to suggest that you come stay with me, instead of at the Parsons' place. But since you are not allergic, and otherwise seem able and adaptable enough, I'd rather have you down there, sort of on minor alert. But lock your car and the house tonight. Forget you have a .22. Sleep with your ears cocked. And if you step outside in the dark, be careful, and *not* aggressive."

I listened to this much, not patiently, but with a kind of jolted wonderment. Now *I* eyed *him*.

"Landell," I gruffed sternly. "Since we've met, you've always zip-

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pered your lip—somewhere. So what's around?"

"Things are always around in woods," he almost teased. "Maybe I just don't want you snooping."

"Goddammit all, Landell!" I growled. "Quit the games! You've been pussyfooting across some subject again and again, without ever telling plainly what it is! You can't say all you've said, without giving me the core of it! I'm a Big Boy—Man—Mature!"

Landell nodded, grim but still mild, now. "I *hope* you are. Just as I *hope* I am. Plus enough others—in our crazy, over-jittery world," he said. Air rasped through his nose. "All right, Crobert—it's a relief to share exotic responsibility, if the sharing is responsibly received. And, being here, you'd better have some information. I can't tell you what's around, because nobody truly knows; there is just a prickly suspicion which asks—'What other answer is there?' I can only give you what we've got so far. So sit tight and listen."

Landell told it all calmly:

"Discount some small preliminary disturbances picked up by the Station's radio telescope; they weren't discovered on the recordings till later. But nine days back—that once at least—something somehow got over our high fence. For a moment, there was a moving shadow—blurred in outline, obviously by some designed interference—on the CR-tube of our low-elevation-scan, security radar. Then, last Monday night—five days ago—over the ridge by my hut, the motor of my car started up—apparently by itself. The ignition switch was neatly jumped by a funny kind of wire. Our lab calls it silver copper alloy, insulated by an oddly flexible silica-glaze. So what?...We also examined the glass of the car—I'll tell you about that, sometime.

"Meanwhile, a dog that belongs to one of our bunch, came howling out of the woods with a small but peculiar burn across its shoulders. That mutt used to bark alot, into the night. Since its injury, though, it will suddenly run, with its back hairs all abristle, and hide somewhere, without even whining.

"And another guard—Brooks—found a snake in a little forest glade. It was all carefully separated, bones from meat. Many surgeons wish they could do as well. Also, some greenish flickerings were seen here and there. But nothing like tracks.

"Of course we've set camera traps, some—no doubt foolishly—with flash-attachments, others with infrared, and even with full-spectrum sensitive film. Similarly, we've located instruments in various places—heat-detectors and sensitive bio-emanation sensors.

"So one of our cameras disappeared. Another was a fused wreck. There have been no pictures. The heat-sensors show nothing—a defensive masking might be involved here—unless temperatures that could be useful are no higher than ambient? On the other hand, the bio-emanation instruments—fine enough to detect the

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sweat moisture and body odor of a clean person a kilometer away—can go truly wild. There's a dim smell—perhaps you've noticed it?—from distant relatives of familiar, volatile organic molecules—as from certain animals, the skunk included—mixed with hydrocarbons, somewhat like those, for instance, in machine lubricants. Bio-emanation analysis indicates this much. But what help is it to us, except to make us more frostily certain that we're involved with a very unique situation?

"Now, Crobert—I'm coming to the part that concerns you in particular. Just last night, from a ways off, I saw a green glow in the cottage that you have. I went to investigate. Perhaps you haven't looked around closely enough yet, but there's a small pane broken in the bedroom—probably to reach the window-latch. No superfluous, advanced technology was applied here—just the simplest, most reasonable burglar method. I almost saw the prowler leave. Though 'almost' amounts to zero. I climbed in through that window, too. Nothing much was unusual inside. Except the odor. And a couple of curious, grayish flakes on the floor. They're being tested and studied in the lab. Now I think I've told you all that's firm."

After Landell stopped talking, I kept staring hard at him.

"Pardon me," I said. "Have you got a distorted sense of humor?"

"No, Crobert."

"Then thanks for levelling with me," I heard myself respond with a fake calm that surely didn't extend to my tingling scalp and troubled, groping wits. "So what do you conclude?"

"No conclusions yet possible, Crobert. I indicated that, before. Speculate for yourself, and perhaps be far-wrong, likewise. My crowd has just got to continue trying to find out more, hopefully getting a look at whatever *It* is, and going on flexibly, from there. Danger, there well may be, though no person has been attacked—yet. Only maybe the dog has so far seen the intruder. Sleep early, if you can, tonight; there could be fun, later. I'd better go down the slope with you, to check around again."

As we descended the darkening path, Landell added another thought:

"Crobert—I hope you haven't got it in your head to go high-balling your car into the village, to the handiest phone, and then flapping your jaw about all this."

"I didn't intend to," I answered, anger starting up in me. "But—come to think of it—everybody is covered by the Right to Know laws."

"True—and those laws are intrinsically correct. Still, would you—for instance—tell a nervous old granny everything about a possible threat, when it would do more harm than good?... True again—certain persons, caught in ticklish emergency situations in the past—I'm thinking of one nuke-fission power plant in particular—were castigated for keeping what incomplete reports they gave, overly reassuring. Those guys were wrong, especially if they just wanted

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to cover their own behinds. Yet even there, there might have been a small, side angle of altruism. Occasionally, a very fine line of ethics and good judgment is involved. . . . But, about our own present situation—imagine the news chains getting wind of so deep and suggestive a thing prematurely—before anybody knows what's what about it at all, and blasting it across the world in the usual instantaneous fashion, and with considerable, possible horror build-up about the Unknown! What should one do? Even if it's so, should one scream 'Fire!' in a packed theatre?"

"You'd think people would have become hardened to fantastic events," I said carefully. "From all the science fiction-like developments of nowadays."

"'Hardened'?" Landell challenged. "Or just more aware that they can happen? Though maybe there isn't a corresponding, popular comprehension. A century ago, a true report like we could give right now wouldn't get very far very fast, and not just because of slower, less vivid communications, then it would have been laughed down as some lunatic's joke. That's no longer quite so. For many decades, the threat of nuclear conflict has been boring into the human psyche. A lot of other developments have disturbed a comforting belief in a staid, trustworthy, stable Earth. I suppose that the fascinations of subliminal fright create a demand for picturizations of what *could* occur. So, sensing money to be made from sickish, public hungers, those in the business keep supplying the horror shows and movies, while demagogues join in. Thus, there are a good many out there who have been made into timid, excitable grannies—and most of them aren't old ladies! . . . Yes—I'm scared of this new thing around us, *for itself,* too, Crobert. And I'm doing my best to keep my wits, concerning it, as are my colleagues. But I think I'm more scared of the panic that might explode among the populace, leading to senseless imagining, rage and violence—when the cause might not merit such reactions at all!

"We've been winning somewhat against air, water, noise and radioactivity pollution. But how about the almost unmentioned worst of them all? Uh-huh—*fear pollution.* I suppose the best countermeasures are in coolness, emotional flexibility, ruggedness, caution, alertness and common sense. And enough guts to face up to reality, whatever it may turn out to be—without imagining a swarm of nameless horrors in advance. Also, some grains of humor might help. . . . Well—I've gotta get circulating. So carry on, Crobert."

Abruptly, Landell left me by the Parsons' cottage, and faded into the darkening forest.

I had to grill and eat that steak alone. It was no hardship. Much of what Landell had said last had mellowed the worries I might have had. My remaining level of excitement—as if it was intensified living—seemed to sharpen my appetite. I

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think I didn't fully realize the grimmer aspects of Landell's account. Perhaps it was too much like the yarns that my kid, Ronnie, went for. I didn't quite believe. Rather, I felt an eagerness, just at the edge of dread. I wondered, scowled, chuckled—and then I wondered some more.

Fully clothed, and with a firewood axe and a flashlight beside me, I slept well—for a while. Then came blurred awareness, thought and action, that moved from dream toward hard facts.

Had somebody called out? Was it dawn? No—the battery-powered digital clock glowed 02:03. I'd heard katydids squawking earlier—frost was late this year. But it occurred to me that even insects might be frightened to silence—which also can suggest a dangerous and unknown presence. But was that creak a property line, barbed-wire fence stretching? Yet where was the rest of the matrix of sound, into which to fit some shape? No footsteps? But need all large intruders have feet? Was there a short circuit somewhere—copper burning green in an electric arc? Gone, now.... Yes—the Parsons had a small, automatic generator unit here. But I mustn't even use my flashlight at this moment! Where was that axe?...

I came fully awake, my shoulder propped against the outside door in an attitude of defense so classic for melodrama that it might have been funny. But I knew I felt the door handle turn, under my fingers. There was a rustle, as of air blowing from—nostrils? Then, without doubt, that stout and bolted panel surged toward me the tiniest bit. Something massive was shoving at its outer side—that close! There was that dry pungence, too—far stronger, now. No bear ever smelled like that.

Maybe, when I was a child, I had reached this same degree of terror once or twice, at night. For an instant, something blocked the tree-framed notch of starlight that should have been visible through the door's small window. And then the bright stars shone once more, as the intruder—warned?—moved to one side. If something analogous to fear was felt out there, it was at least mastered by—cunning? The rustle of branches, when it came, was from quite a few meters distant.

Further knowledge seemed to offer me the only possible relief from explosive tension. So, still clutching the axe, I unbolted the door. My flashlight beam groped, finding only forest undergrowth.

Yet then, some ways off, I saw two columnar members limned against hot green. The spark died. But not far to my left, bushes crackled into flame. Moments later, toward the ridge, rocks rattled down.

I started at Landell's voice:

"It would be bad to follow, Crobert." He was whipping the flame out with his jacket. "Though we both know better now how deep and uncertain this whole situation is."

"Something from astronomical distance?" I panted. "Come close. Not make-believe, this time? What

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you've kept hinting at, Landell."

I was in that cold, sweating dread to be guarded against.

"Maybe. Damn—I wish that there was snow on the ground," Landell growled. "Or mud. To take marks we could see." His harsh tone sounded quietly desperate and frantic.

"If not the object itself, at least some of the mold," I amended. "Hey—how about fingerprint technique someplace?"

"Our lab people tried that—on my car windows," Landell answered. "No whorls, as in human fingers. Crosshatch instead. And not from fingers. We couldn't tell what they were. Sometimes they seemed covered. Or should I say, 'gloved'?"

"Extraterrestrial," I breathed, awed. "And sentient. It has to be."

"That's my gut feeling too, Crobert. Not proven yet. Or could somebody, very good indeed at fakery, be masquerading, for a purpose? Probably pointless, and far too difficult. Still, we don't know! Accept appearances—that an intrusion *has* come from beyond this planet. Does it make motive too mundane if we suppose that the object is to look around, perhaps especially at the Research Station—easy to spot from its electromagnetic emanations? Or am I being paranoid about our small scientific accomplishments? In any case, wouldn't basic purposes have to be similar to ours? Getting energy? Nourishment? Wondering what this or that is—for curiosity, safety? And learning?"

"They'd use a probe first, wouldn't they?" I offered, my 'they' of just then surely in its X-for-unknown mode. "We would. A precaution."

"We don't know that what we're dealing with isn't a probe," Landell retorted. "A robot—or remote-controlled telefactor. Even though what we so fractionally saw suggests live animation. It could be an expendable, contrived device—entirely biological. Or maybe a much superior half-and-half—bio-mechanical? There's nothing that we can snap-judge about, in our own human terms. Too much is bound to be different."

The vibrance of Landell's voice showed that his usual cool was under heavy strain. His tensions and mine reenforced each other.

"Like many, I half believed in contact with a totally outside culture at some time," I complained. "But I thought it would begin with some simple, one-two-three-four signal, picked up by radio telescope, likely in the twenty-one centimeter wavelength of cold hydrogen. Or coded someway into the genes of a common virus, perhaps propelled to us long ago from the stars. But possibly a face-to-face encounter—like what seems to be pending? Huh! Might happen in a thousand years, I thought!"

"Yuh—our idea stereotypes," Landell sighed dryly.

"Hey! What are we just standing out here in the night for?" I exclaimed with abrupt, leap-frogging urgency.

"Scrambling around furiously, like a frantic small dog trying to catch a

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field mouse in a dark woods is just the kind of ruinous action and psychology we have to avoid, Crobert," he countered. "My guys are scattered around on watch. There are a dozen square kilometers, rugged and forested, to comb. And we don't dare close with this wily and elusive Presence too fast. Besides, I've been sort of following it since nightfall, and I'm a bit weary. We'll wait till morning. Come sit with me over at my hut, Crobert."

While I locked up the Parsons' place, Landell said a few words into his walkie-talkie: "Mitch?... Uhuh—you got it too....Another partial sighting. In Sector Three. Headed north—upward..."

Now I remembered something. Warily covering its lens with my fingers, I switched on my flashlight for a moment, and explored the litter I had swept out of the cottage in the afternoon. Thus I found one husklike flake. Gingerly, I put it in my jacket breast pocket.

The path up over the ridge wasn't too hard to negotiate, even mostly in the dark. Landell was cautious about entering his quarters.

"Light should keep away visitors that don't care to be spotted," he remarked, as he ignited a propane lantern. It glared whitely over an army cot, table, books, rifle, etc.

Landell was on the phone for a minute: "...Yes, again, Brooks.... So are we fairly sure about its probable location-area, daytimes?... Okay—'copters and the bunch before sunup—if that's what's wanted. I hope that's not entirely crazy..."

As he put down the phone, I took the fuzzy gray flake from my pocket, sniffed at its fading pungence, then set it on the table beside him.

His lean face showed vertical lines of wry humor, and no surprise.

"Yuh, Crobert—from your borrowed cottage, huh? Like the ones the lab has been examining. Got a verbal report a few hours ago. Hmmm—might be you shouldn't touch, or smell of, such things. Though suppose you'll survive that much!"

"What did the lab say?" I demanded avidly.

"Chemical composition, mostly an exotic polysaccharide—with silicon and selenium atoms linked into the molecules," Landell responded. "A kind of horn? That much of our X-intruder seems to be biological—faunal—animal. But pretty definitely of an alien chain of evolution?... Wait! I've got a microscope here. Lets look for ourselves!"

Landell placed the flake expertly with a tweezers, adjusted the instrument, and peered long and hard. Then he let me look.

"Thousands of little, hollow cells," I said softly.

"Yuh," Landell grunted. "Someways, the whole thing resembles a bird feather, though the barbs run lengthwise, instead of outward from a central shaft, which it doesn't have. But those air cells would be fine heat insulation in a rugged climate. And notice—at the bottom end, there's a whole row of tiny prongs—for attach-

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ment to—skin? Notice further—the few bright red specks clinging to the prongs? Like Earthly red blood corpuscles, but larger, and very red indeed—rich in some parallel of hemoglobin—for absorbing oxygen in either a thin atmosphere, or one low in content of that vital gas."

"Thanks for the information, Professor," I said with gentle sarcasm. "Good to know. But does it advance our understanding very much?"

"Probably not," Landell replied, almost with apology. "Though there are more likenesses with Earthly fauna than we might have expected—which could be some sort of reassurance. But I think that now there's ample evidence for concluding what we were almost sure of.... Join me with a beer, Crobert?"

"Thanks," I said.

As he handed me the opened can, I leaned back against the tattered upholstry of the old chair in which I sat. But then I hunched forward in an impluse of rebellious questioning.

"Landell," I gruffed. "For thousands of years we, on Earth, have remained separate from any worrisome contacts from space. Insulated and protected by hundreds of millions of empty kilometers—light-years, more probably! So, *why, now?*"

"Yes," he answered. "Why?... Though it could be true, how do we know we have been so insulated? How do we know that the flying saucer stories—though discredited by many—are all false? Or that *real* strangers haven't been visiting our planet, now and then, for ages? On-scene accounts would have gotten stuck in the slow pace of former eras, getting hardly beyond a limited locality. Or else they would have blended into the then acceptable demonology.... But now, with TV and all the rest.... And with unmistakable proof likely.... And with at least some vague, often scary, comprehension of the universe possessed by almost everyone..."

Landell leaned his face into his hands for a second, and blew air between his fingers. When he looked up again, his gaunt cheeks were haggard.

"Crobert," he growled. "I hate to admit it to you or myself. But this day that's already with us, no matter what happens—and I hope it doesn't include some utterly stupid, ignorant, hysterical mistakes!—is going to be bad. There's no way for it to be any less—even with the best of outcomes. There are all those people all over—bent the way our culture has been bending them for years. Most are stable and courageous, sure. But enough aren't. I guess I'm cynical. But indications are fair that everyone carries a seed of panic; the danger is in the degree of individual control. When the news comes out publicly—with clear, visible evidence—with all the hovering menace of the totally unknown to ram into fumbling, hyper-stimulated imaginations...

"Sure—there is a legal and proper Right to Know. But 'to know' isn't what some folks mean in their hearts; 'to be reassured' is how it should read for them. If they can't be reassured,

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it's somebody else's—*your*—fault, even though no human person has caused the central fact that has now come about. They'll be asking dumb questions that nobody can answer with any certainty. If you can't instantly do better than that, with optimism, giving them their grain of comfort, then you'll be stupid—an enemy. They'll be hating you, and each other, and tearing at anyone obstructing their escape-route—to where? They'll be thinking of conquest and destruction by extraterrestrial beings—which *might* be true. Many will likely worry about extreme improbabilities—rape by monsters, or serving as food—though why, apart from having read some dumb yarn? It's hard to imagine creatures of an entirely separate biological origin, craving the flesh of human beings."

Landell, tough and steady though he usually seemed, now appeared to need reassurance, himself. Wasn't it ironical that somebody else—me—felt the urge to give it to him? Though I was sure I'd be kidding us both?

"Ah—Landell—let's wait and see—maybe the outlook isn't as bad as you think," was all I said.

He smirked with half his face, and took a swallow of beer. "Uh—perhaps," he grunted dubiously. "I'm sorry I spilled my guts to you. But I guess I needed that much relief. Anyhow, I suppose you want to join the big hunt-down that we're ordered to undertake?"

"Yes—I do," I replied.

"Thought so. But it isn't long till we have to start out. I, for one, need to doze a little. Flop on the cot, if you like, Crobert. For me, an hour or so of that isn't worth the bother."

We both catnapped where we were, in chairs. In the frosty, predawn blackness, Landell kicked my foot. We gulped instant coffee, and had some dry cereal. The phone rang, to make sure we were up and ready for what had never been, before.

Just then, I was wondering whether I'd survive till noon. But I also had the idea that, though I'd be unarmed and useless, still I was part of the first line of defense, and didn't dare run. I wondered what Mary, and Ronnie with his romantic view of the universe, and little Joannie with her dolls and her womanish ways, might have to try to live with, from now on....Yet, too—in contradiction—I was fascinated, eager.

In the first streaky light of morning, we descended the ridge by a path I hadn't been on before. We rendezvoused with an olive-drab truck, which I now knew was one of several, positioned around the heights, where the ridge became a low mountain.

This particular truck mounted electronic detecting-gear, and even a small, stubby laser beam projector, though its muzzle was turned peacefully backwards. Out of the vehicle piled men, and several women, all in helmets, and forest green costumes much like army fatigues, but with badges like Landell's. They carried recoilless rifles, using self-

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propelled, guidable projectiles. Nobody looked inattentive.

Now a blue truck, bristling with TV equipment, arrived. Landell went over to it, his face like a thundercloud, as if he considered its occupants the most dangerous and treacherous of enemies.

Helicopters were chomping loudly overhead, so I caught only part of his soft, polite, but deadly cold words: "... You know ...Extreme restraint ... No exaggerated language ..."

Among those who shook his hand, I recognized two well-known news-commentators, one a woman.

He ambled back closer to me, meanwhile speaking quietly into his walkie-talkie:

"... Are we set?....Okay—all groups ahead toward Top by the prescribed paths ...Slowly. ..Halt and freeze before any indication ..."

I studied Landell, gray-haired and hard-jawed, and I wondered what his rank was in the outfit to which he belonged. He wore no special insignia to go by, though I knew he wasn't uppermost. He was commanded to carry out higher orders, with which he might not fully agree. I thought I sensed a further lecture coming on, to the visible group and those farther off—a laying down of the law in caution and intent, from him—a good-joe with some authority, and terrible things on his mind. For we were all at the threshold of multiple, obscured enigmas. Procedures and outlooks might have to change abruptly. Were we adaptable enough?... But who knew anything at this stage?

There didn't have to be a lecture. For a young man said, almost mildly:

"Hey—look!"

He was pointing up the mountain. Among the rocks and scrub near its crest, I saw movement. Yes. Break your back to find out something—maybe even almost despair; still there are occasions when, effortlessly, what you are after appears to your view.

A form, the color of rock, reared up and stood there, far off—a rough-hewn sort of thing, supported by two columns—legs. Indeed two. Maybe that much of human form is fairly common among the knowing tribes of the universe, and certain of their machines, for it leaves other limbs free for work and experiment. The shape also had an upper protrusion—a head—most details lost in distance, except for two pearly spots. Are there bound to be eyes, wherever there is light, and must there usually be a pair, to provide the double-viewpoints for depth perception?

Now I saw that the apex—the tufted "head" of the figure, seemed entirely enveloped in a covering as transparent and crinkly as thin polyethylene, sparked, too, with glints of metal, as the first sunrays touched the heights.

That was all there was to see, with unaided eyes. Landell had raised his binoculars. I had only the little video camera he had lent me. As I let its recorder roll, I saw the Visitor's magnified bulk through its framing lens for perhaps three seconds, before the shape folded down out of sight in

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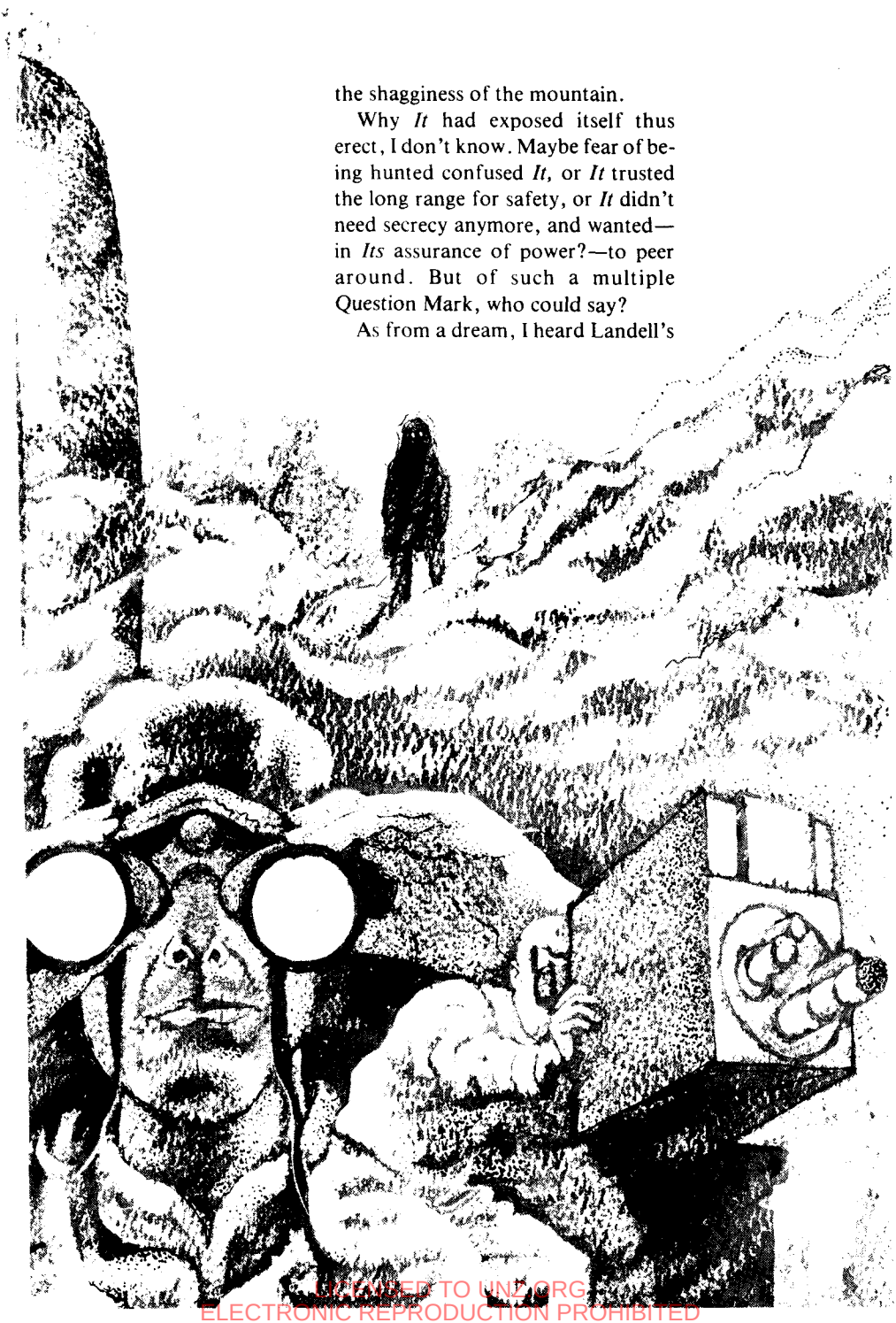
the shagginess of the mountain.

Why *It* had exposed itself thus erect, I don't know. Maybe fear of being hunted confused *It,* or *It* trusted the long range for safety, or *It* didn't need secrecy anymore, and wanted—in *Its* assurance of power?—to peer around. But of such a multiple Question Mark, who could say?

As from a dream, I heard Landell's



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quiet, intense words, into his hand-held communicator:

"...Hartman and Crassen—you've seen from over there?... Nothing changes yet....We'll stay fanned out....Keep moving up, slow ....Dammit—no nervous stuff with any weapons! No abrupt gestures, either!... Avoid close contact—at least now!... Television personnel—hear this!—keep well back!..."

So the day had a pattern, though no hint of how it would end. All the green-clad persons in my vicinity were tense and methodical. By noon we ringed the mountain in a tightened net, more than halfway up its sides. By one o'clock, we were only a couple of hundred meters farther, but we had gingerly inspected every rock and shrub, while 'copters kept watch.

I can scarcely say that I got bored, yet alertness may have lost its fine edge. Suddenly, while I peered into a thicket of scrub conifers, *It* and I were face to face, so to speak, with only five meters of distance, and an immeasurable extent of difference and doubt, between us. *It* was huddled down in a manner peculiar to itself, and seemed to have wormed *Its* way backward among the prickly, concealing growths, until a rock ledge had stopped *It*.

Do I seem to brag now, when I say that this was a truly matchless, historical time-fragment? A supreme *Once,* in billions of years of terrestrial history, and perhaps of another world—or worlds—as well? The first definitely recognized meeting, across an immense time-and-space gap, and totally separate chains of evolution and development, of two different, and sentient, results! What could be more awesome and terrifying—yet magnificent? I felt this less with my mind—jolted from best clarity by suddenness, when I was a shade off-guard—than with my nerves, muscles and bones—as if such simple tissues grasped the importance even more fundamentally. And was the reaction parallel, on the Other Side?

That "head" was in plain view, and in excellent, though shaded, daylight. There may be a minor blurring of my visual memory from then, since I was under stress. But, beyond the veil of clear, crinkly stuff, I saw a pair of tawny, fleshy flaps, slotted like combs, and moving back and forth as in respiration. There was a system of tubes, apparently artificial, perhaps for breathing in our atmosphere. On other surfaces of that huddled mass—no doubt somewhat larger than myself—grey husks made a pattern, like scale-armor. The eyes—which gave me an unmistakable impression of intent observation and cold knowingness—had pearly lids, semi-transparent, that blinked over midnight black. And a pinkish, dexterous cluster curled around a rod with a coppery knob, holding it poised.

Thus a Mystery, beyond what telescopes—visual or radio—or outward ranging instrumented vehicles had ever revealed, had been brought close for us to behold. Call this occasion A First Glimpse, of a configuration to which my Ronnie would apply

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the science fiction term, far older than himself—BEM, for Bug Eyed Monster. Maybe I was of that order to the Intruder, too. Physical contrast might make such opinions inevitable.

Instead of dropping defensively prone, I froze as I was, almost upright. From the paralysis of terror? Or from calmer control and wisdom, backed up by Landell's earlier orders? It might have been from a portion of both. I was unarmed. Nor did I lift the camera, hanging from a strap around my neck. I had no doubt at all that that coppery knob—with the energy-bolt it could throw—was aimed. Standing, I was a perfect target at close range—and from a protected, crouched down position. To miss was impossible. I felt already dead.

I thought of handshakes, helloes and friendly grins. But where was there any likeness of custom, or even physical means? I thought—Goodbye, Mary and kids. You'll have to see yourselves through this, for however long or short a while you last . . .

Somebody grunted, "What-in-hell'" off to my left.

Then, from behind me, Landell warned evenly: "Stay still, Crobert."

A minute must have passed like that, motion congealed, except for breathing and heartbeats. But thoughts must have swarmed behind those weird eyes. He—she—it—who knew that *It* had gender at all?—must never have perceived humans a tenth so plainly before. I suppose some of the people behind me could have shot *It*—with some difficulty. But they restrained themselves—because of Landell's instructions—plus awe, good judgment, instinct, or whatever. Perhaps to avoid its own destruction, the Intruder remained likewise unaggressive. Who could know?

At last air hissed out of *It*. The coppery knob lowered slowly. And there was a kind of twitter, buzz, grunt—combined. To my ears, such vocalizations were surely no more human than a frog-song, or the rasp of a katydid.

Then the Alien levered itself upward a little, and scuttled toward other rocks and thickets on higher ground, in a kind of hunched-down run, much lower than our anatomy allows us Earthlings. *Its* limbs were braced with metal that may have delivered force to compensate for a difference in gravity? Unless the whole creature, being, probe—whatever—was also a bio-mechanical integration? Again *It* found concealment. But there was a brilliant green flash, and this time a report like momentary thunder. Incandescent droplets of molten rock shot skyward. Up the slope, a bush burned.

"You kept your wits, Crobert—good job," Landell said, beside me.

Then he spoke to everybody close around, and also into his walkie-talkie, to reach all the others:

"With pictures now, we know better what's going on. Stop where you are, everybody! We'll wait a while and see what else happens . . ."

Landell was trying his intuition.

Tension had eased somewhat. But this could never last. We smoked,

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cussed and marvelled, and imagined inconceivables. We were very sure that significance and impact were by no means ended, but had only enormously begun. Nothing would ever be the same on Earth again, but who could guess at the changes? The Unknown was as huge as the universe, out to the remotest quasars.

While his colleagues waited alertly for further developments, a TV reporter hurried toward lower ground with his event-filled video camera, toward their communications-vehicle. His face was pallid and set.

Landell, cool though his nature was, was almost as pale, under his tan.

"There it goes, Crobert," he told me glumly. "The whole schmear. No doubt including telephoto shots about as plain as anything even you saw. Projected out over the whole Earth. Nothing can be held back. Right to Know—and I agree. Still, in this particular case, I keep wondering. News of it to the steady and the not-so-steady. To nerves and incomprehensions frazzled by half a century of one kind of bizarre strain or another, much of it imaginary. And now even deep space may never seem a safe limit again—for so many folks clinging to their possessions, comforts and security, so often threatened. Because a visitation too strange to be trusted has come out of it. More may appear tomorrow, or next year, or the next century, or even within this hour! I'm scared of *that much,* myself, Crobert. Yet I'm doubly scared of selfish, witless panic, among us on Earth. Sorry—I'm being repetitious. Though, if the intrusion is as terrible as some will suppose, I guess no publicity will matter."

I knew what Landell meant. I shrugged. What else could I do or say? My own face must have looked quite haggard and weary.

We kept waiting, into the afternoon. At 16:00—four o'clock—Landell planned to start us up the mountain again. Meanwhile, somebody had brought us refreshments. I don't know whether the sandwich I ate was good or not. But the coke unstuck my dried-out throat.

Just after a quarter to four, the next development came—managing to be a conforming total surprise. There was a flash, bright in the sunshine, but not as bright as you'd think. No flame, but an aural blueness, tipped by a solid dart that whispered up from the mountain, climbing. Not a disc, or flying saucer. And quite small, really.

I thought I saw *It* through the clear walls, harnessed and braced by glinting metal. There was a muddled tumult inside me, as I used the camera: relief—that drained away into some hollow place of still-never-knowing. So hatred and fear remained. Also, there were questions. Did demon-patience, hibernation, or ultimate freezing, to complete vital-suspension, enable *It* to journey for centuries like that? Or might *It* bypass even light-years of distance by some yet-unfound—by humans—rift in the structure of space? And would *It* soon be back, with a horde of *Its* kind?...

Such thoughts and emotions would

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linger, after a few seconds it took for the blue spark to curve toward the eastward heights, its hue scaling down through the spectrum, until—a fading, ruddy pinpoint—it winked out abruptly, as if the vehicle had surpassed some visual speed limit.

Presently I was aware of Landell's speaking into the October quiet:

"... So, everybody—I suppose we should restart our mountain-climbing. My apologies for calling a halt ... But let's not get carried away ... All the same sharp caution as before! We still don't know what else might be farther up....Though, till now, things have certainly turned out as well as could be expected. No bad mistakes. I owe—we all owe—thanks..."

In spite of Landell's warnings, everyone hurried somewhat, including him. Near the crest, we reached a flat area of rock, glazed and still glowing with heat; the radioactive level was only slightly elevated. Fifty paces away, we found a pocket, three meters deep, covered with pine-scrub. It was glassy inside, as if intense heat, too, had been used to dig it. The Lair.

Warily, and with test instruments thrust ahead, a little crowd of us peered inside, with flashlights. But an official wearing a business suit had appeared, and we weren't allowed to creep inside.

Anyhow, there wasn't much to see: some small, empty cylinders made of thin metal. The opened end of one was turned toward us, and at its bottom were dregs which looked—almost leafy? Food? Most of the discarded cylinders were neatly stacked. One was stuffed with colored bits of what might have been—cellulose?—paper? Odd, human parallels? It was eerie.

Besides, there was what looked like a rectangular piece of padding. And a notched bar—a broken tool? Against the obsidianlike wall of the burrow was a circular object with a large, pearly center, and around its rim, line-markings that suggested the graduations of some sort of scale. A few of those chaffy gray husks were littered about. And that pungence lingered. That was about all.

I stepped away from the Lair, to let others have a look. But the official was waving everybody back.

"My latest instructions have arrived," he boomed out. "To seal the hole, and have it guarded for careful study. There could be very dangerous things in it..."

When, minutes later, I saw that Landell had wandered a little apart from higher authority, I ambled over to him.

"Yuh—Crobert," he said with a tired grin. "I have to wait around for materials. I suppose they'll bring a steel and plastic cover of some kind. You're lucky—you can leave whenever you want to."

"No sense to that right now," I answered. "Roads'll be jammed for sure. But I want to go down to the trucks. Maybe, from somebody there, I can wrangle a radio link with the telephone lines—get in touch with my family."

Landell looked at me testily with

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harried eyes—as if I sought privilege. "Not a chance," he said. "Everybody will be wanting something like that. When mobile communications has a backed-up overload of news coverage, reaching from now till who-knows." Then he seemed to relent. "Tell you what, though, Crobert. Here's a key to my hut. You might make contact on my phone."

"Thanks, Landell," I said.

"Naa," he scoffed. "The media crowd hasn't fully realized, yet, that you were the front-man in today's main incident, or that you just missed becoming the first human-with-alien casualty. Crobert, you deserve a break, including one chance to talk to your own, in real, simple, anonymous privacy. The others will get to you fast enough. So scoot to my place. Unless you want to go explain just who you are to the news folks, and converse with home under their auspices, with them broadcasting the whole bit?..."

I hurried off. Even directly on a phone line, it took trying—to get through to the city. In a wide emergency—and I'm sure there never had been anything like this one—overloads can happen. Yet the system had become pretty good. On the fifth attempt, my button-punching worked. I heard the phone ringing in my home.

Mary said, "Hello?"

"I'm okay, Darling," I stated without any preliminaries. "So tell me what..."

"Arnie! We know," She quavered. "We've been watching on TV. We're all right. Joannie cried, but now she's laughing. She hardly understands. Ronnie is glued—of course. But the whole town, state, country, world ....So many wanting to dash off somewhere. The Parsons too—I've calmed them down some—wanted me to go with them—I said I had to wait till I got word from you. The traffic's a catastrophe....Some seem to think full-scale monster invasion will begin tomorrow—if not before. That the Thing only left to bring back his friends....Civil Defense is out, and the broadcasts have joined them in trying to restore calm....Still—even in this usually quiet neighborhood—can you hear, Arnie?"

"Yes, Mary-love," I said.

The background tumult was in the phone receiver. A car roaring along the residential block. Another... more cars...brake squealings... hysterical voices yelling enraged imprecations... murders were surely being added to the crash deaths on the roads. How much worse than this could it be, if a multi-megaton missile were actually curving down?... Frightened, truculent, selfish stupidities! Why one sometimes hated and wanted to kill the idiot in his own kind—even in himself. When some dark unknown—terror of possibility, surely as much of mind as of fact—was shoved abruptly before it, and its soft, impractical wish for total safety. I had enough likeness with those troubled persons, to grasp the thoughts that drove them:

What's this? Horrors from another planet—star? We've always heard

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about such loony stuff. . . . Now we've seen one—there it was—living, breathing, right close up and very clear, in the tube! Hideous and mean! And armed! No fake! . . . Oh, Gawd! . . . Our damned politicians, scientists, army, air force—why didn't they tell us, long ago! . . . Now where—how? . . . My mate, kids, me . . . Others are sure to come . . .

Such bitter, negative fantasies scrambled across my mind in an instant. Blaming "them" for their senseless panic, when a monumental event, with unforeseeable, nebulous, potentially dreadful consequences, had crunched and ground into the fragile order of their small, self-centered existences. I didn't fully grasp, just then, that I was more one of "them" than I might admit. Out on the highways, ready to run anybody down who got in the way of their fear. Killing each other for car fuel. The dumb, ignorant, scared bastards! . . .

I didn't delay speaking further to Mary for more than seconds. She had sounded agitated all right, but in control, as she had always been.

"Arnie? . . ."

"I'm still here, Love," I reassured her. "Thanks for being rugged. Look—I'll be home as soon as I manageably, possibly, can—which may be

IN TIMES TO COME

Bob Buckley is familiar to Analog readers from short stories and articles; next month we begin his first novel. It takes diligence—and courage—to set a story in this solar system these days, with new information coming in so fast, but that's Bob Buckley's specialty; he's sent several updates to incorporate the latest available findings. *World in the Clouds* is about the colonization of Venus, in the not-too-distant future. Venus might seem one of the last places humans would attempt to colonize, the surface being as hellish as it is—but there's another way, dramatically illustrated by Vincent Di Fate's cover.

Another Anniversary Special is Mack Reynolds' "Golden Rule," a new tale of secret agent Paul Kosloff. It may remind you briefly of another recent story, but it doesn't take long to go its separate way. The fact article, by Robert A. Freitas, Jr., describes "A General Theory of Living Systems" which attempts to define the basic processes of life in terms applicable to systems from cells to galactic empires.

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some hours. Meanwhile, trust your good judgment. Though maybe you'd best stay put. Keep the house locked, in case there are some nuts."

"I've already done that, Arnie," she answered. "And I've gotten your old 30-30 down from the attic; it could be a help, even if there aren't any cartridges....You watch yourself, though, Arn! We'll be okay."

"Sure you will!" I urged vigorously. "And now—say!—could I talk to Ron a minute?"

Yes—my young heir—my Dreamer of a Future of Bold Spacemen in Imponderable Regions. With him I felt compelled to speak.

"Dad?" He sounded awed and little. Yet there was a steadiness.

"Look, Son," I said. "It has happened. What you wanted. All at once, and not from Earth outward, like we thought. More of those beings might come, and it could be different from in the Terran-hero books."

"I know, Pop. I noticed you on TV even before Mom did, and you were super!... One TV-man keeps saying the Off-Earther came from maybe Jupiter; but this Alien is all wrong to be from such a Gas Giant, and you can tell the guy doesn't know beans. Though the spacecraft flew east—away from the sun, and accelerating very fast. So it's got to be from another star system."

There was a tiny lisp in Ronnie's voice—when he hadn't lisped for years. But underneath this slight, babyish reversion, still there was that cool steadiness. My nine-year-old was with *his time—his era*. He was already attuned. Unlike so many adults, he wasn't suffering from Future Shock. He had lived more with Time to Come than with Yesterday, and What Had Been. He wasn't an old, out-of-step anachronism, though he sounded sombre and ancient.

"Then you understand—deep down, and not just making believe—what I've said, Ron?" I demanded sternly.

"I think so, Dad. It's all right. I don't believe there's any immediate danger. But if so I'll help astrogate."

"I love you and thank you, Son," I said. "And I'll be home with pictures..." I cradled the phone.

I had a brief contact with the media. Events had been far too big for them to make very much of mere, participating personalities. And I found that they were earnestly trying to help bring calm.

While I waited for the traffic horror to maybe thin out somewhat, from sheer exhaustion, I got in some needed sack-time in the Parsons' cottage. I drove back to the city in the wee morning hours. Late though it was, the tangle of runners-to-nowhere was still bad, and there were bloodied wrecks all along the highway.

So here we are—three weeks since *then*. With nothing very new from the huge, stellar Outside. No further authenticated visitations—*yet*. Maybe there won't be another till next month—or the next millennium. Nobody can know. And there is the crux of our lasting situation. Com-

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plete uncertainty. But the watch is out by every means of science; flexible plans, perhaps to provide some sort of readiness before so awesome and impenetrable a blank, are being formulated. All of which is as it should be.

Our world is slipping back toward something like normalcy, though different from what it was. Lots of people are looking foolish for having panicked and run, defending themselves, not always very reasonably, for the why of it—though, for all we know, they were partly right. But, if they scoff too much, and drop back into complacency—as some surely will—they could suddenly be as scared as before, and repeat the tragic nonsense.

But, in general, a good result is showing—an old one, I believe. We humans are odd, inconsistent creatures. We can be more silly and emotional than terrified fowls, but with a poisonous selfishness that is our own. Yet Landell was partly wrong—as he admits with pleasure. For when we think, and when a situation becomes grimly *real*, we stiffen up, drop our petty angers, half-fancied dreads, and concerns about the importance of comfortable routines, and join, shoulder-to-shoulder, till we feel strong and competent together and not alone—though our free selves remain ourselves. Thus we are comforted, and are more ready for whatever happens—though we can't foretell what it may be, or what united efforts it may demand. Sensible caution is retained, of course. But in the possibility of *real* danger, even our mistrusting nations must depend on each other. And much of the Fear Pollution that has plagued our time is swept away. Courage emerges from need. One makes a wry joke with a friend, and there is inner peace. We are on a new, bigger frontier, as we begin to realize.

More and more people—I, included—have rooted themselves out of the Now-That-Was—the Past—and are trying to relocate in the Now-That-Is; we can no longer call it the Future. We are, as always, trapped in Time; we can't go back to the simplicities of—say—the year 1910—still nostalgically wished for by some, though they forget the diseases and social injustices. We could not return to such bland uncomplication, even if we seriously wanted to: for one thing, we have grown far too numerous, and the effects of other choices made long ago, and courses taken, have become equally massive and unreversible, except by furies to be avoided. So we are caught in the rigidity of history. Nor, is the choosing, and blame or approval, always our own. No past steps can be erased; for good or bad, we can only go forward, into the unknown—if we have the guts. Complete safety was always a myth. As perhaps we've learned.

These days, Ronnie's eyes shine more than ever. One wonders about a little guy such as he. At age twenty-five, where might he be? Helping to build some permanent settlement on Mars, or on a Jovian moon? Or even somewhere much more distant? Ah—

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there's an inscrutible feel of romance, here, a vigorous, blood-tingling excitement. I can almost regret that I was born too soon.

From that glassy hole in the mountain—the Lair of the Visitor—tested still with prudent precaution—a few very exotic viruses, not to be considered lightly, have turned up. And some alloys that may prove useful, if they can be duplicated on Earth. The round object with the opalescent center has shown multi-colored, occasionally almost-shaped flickerings, when certain points at its rim are touched. Further reports about it aren't yet released. We can imagine all we want. Or we can wait, possibly finding out nothing more.

I have been asked to write up What Has Happened as a personal experience. So what should I add as the final page?

What sticks with me firmest is my worst moment, in the sunblaze, on the slopes of a very minor mountain, myself one of two total strangenesses, confronting each other in the very first meeting, I at a disadvantage. Very close, and exposed.

The Alien, from its protected position, didn't use its readied and powerful weapon to kill or injure me or my companions. Sure—maybe *It* feared quick retribution.

I've touched on the question before, in this account: Can we grant an entity so different, and from so very far, components of consciousness at least parallel to our own fear—or hatred?

The atoms throughout the universe seem much the same. So can't we extend the sameness—even across vast differences of detail—to biology? Aren't fear and hatred part of the mechanism for staying alive, for any animated creature, anywhere?

Indeed we may still have to face such dark emotions from beyond our own known regions. To deny that would be foolish and unrealistic. To meet the possibility, it is agreed that we must be rugged, prepared, controlled, alert, adaptable. If we hold onto this decision, I think we will be.

Maybe there are other biological universalities, to aid in the survival of mates, offspring, friends—and hoped-for friends, even if bizarre and untrusted. How about love and courage, and—at higher levels of consciousness—compassion and restraint?

So, could *It* have been like this, too? We can guess that *It* came to Earth to explore and learn, for *Its* fellows, somewhere. Or we can speculate, more loosely, that *It* was a loner, a wanderer, even a fugitive. Such thoughts may be just human simplistics, while the true purposes could be beyond our comprehension.

I'm firmly sure of very little, really. Still, I'm kind of betting that, if we have the guts to keep our heads and our common virtues, we may never have to use the armaments we are reasonably holding onto, and will make out all right with most Others.

Also, I'm damned glad to be alive—*truly alive!*—in this fascinating, most exciting era! ■

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Jay Kay Klein's

BIOLOG

Raymond Z. Gallun

Ray has never been a full-time writer, until his retirement in 1976 from thirty years of technical writing. The last eleven years were for U.S. Navy manuals on submarine detection and tracking by sonar. His education was mostly self-acquired, aside from less than two years at the University of Wisconsin terminated by the Depression. He studied French at the Alliance Française in Paris for a year and a half, leaving at the outbreak of World War II, and took a summer course during 1960 in Hispanic literature at San Marcos University in Lima, Peru.

Born in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin in 1911, Ray has been around the world several times, twice since his retirement, visiting or living in some seventy-six countries. In 1978 he married his childhood sweetheart met the year before in South America after a separation of forty years. Their honeymoon was spent in China. Underlying his travels is an interest in archeology, languages, ethnology, and Egyptology.

Ray has published fiction of all types, though he wrote very little science fiction since 1961 because the pay then was so small. Now he's back to his first love with renewed enthusiasm. His most recent book was Eden Cycle for Ballantine in 1974. And if any publisher can summon up the courage to handle a manuscript of 1450 pages, Ray has a novel about a science fiction writer.

At the 1979 World Science Fiction Convention in Brighton, England, Ray received the Hall of Fame Award from First Fandom for his contributions to the literature of science fiction.

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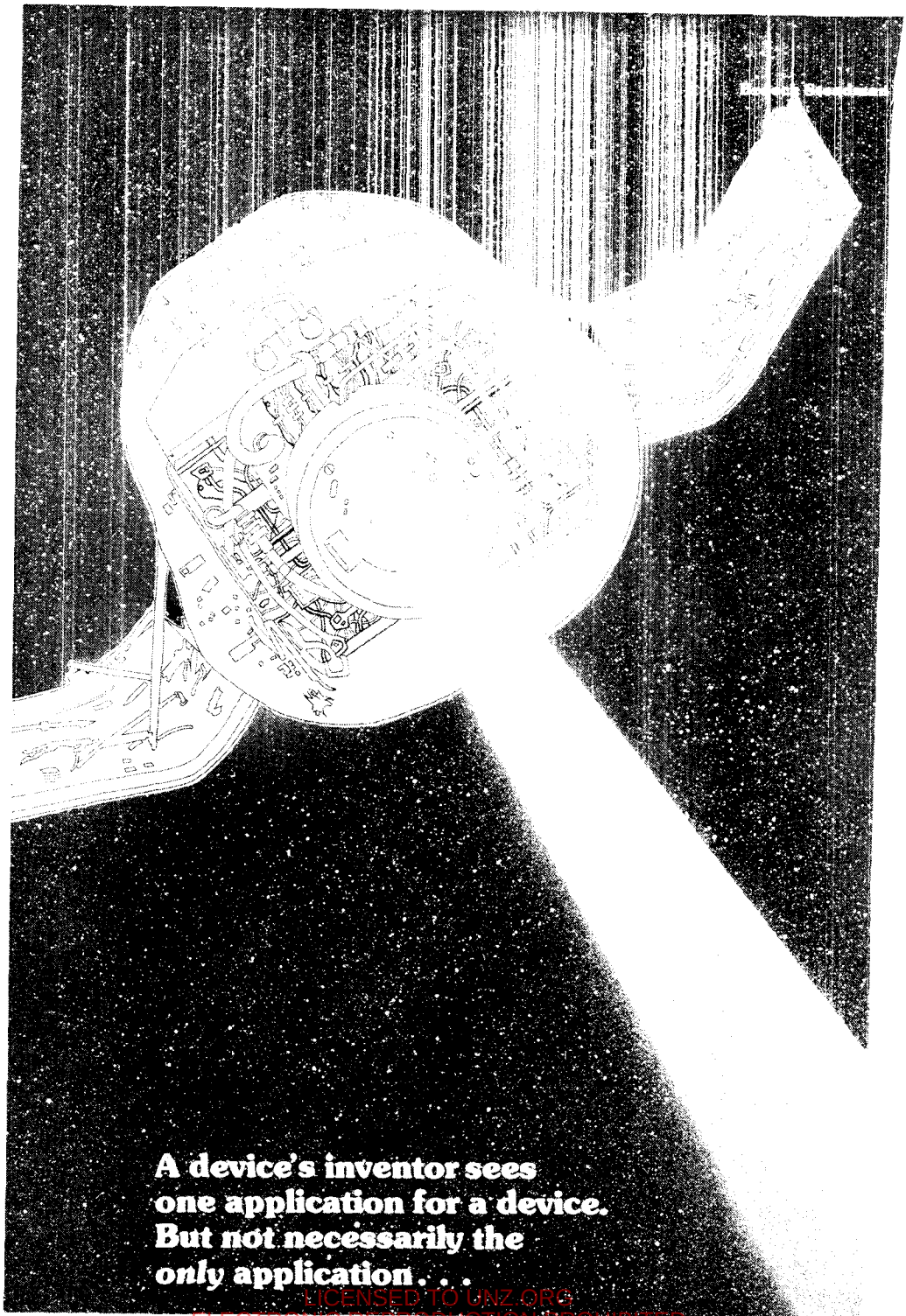

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Take your problems to the cops, and all your business gets shoved in a computer. You got about as much privacy as a stripper at the Mayfair on a Saturday night. Some people are more delicate. That's why there's still room for an anachronism like me. I'm what in the twentieth century they called a private eye. My name is Chapel. William Chapel.

I was sitting in my cramped rented office unbending paper clips when Phil-er-up Green called. He was one of the computer programmers—cops, for short—down at Public Security. They'd give him all the data from a new case, point him to a terminal, and tell him to Phil-er-up. He didn't think it was funny any more.

Neither did I.

Phil was a friend of mine. At least, he'd call once in a while when he latched onto something he thought I'd be interested in. My cheap terminal didn't have a colorphone, but I knew his crewcut hair was the color of the inside of an empty can of peas. His watery blue eyes were about as penetrating as a rubber knife, and his mouth leaked language rather than spoke. He was a loner but not by choice. I at least paid attention to him. He knew his job, and he gave me good leads.

"I was out by the front desk when this kid comes in—about twenty, long blonde hair straight down her back, nice tan—she wants help finding her boyfriend. Seems they'd been extra cozy for a few months when suddenly he begins to get nervous and then disappears. Only, when she finds out it all has to go on the record, she shuts up. Apologizes for bothering us. Says her boyfriend was probably called away on business at the last moment and didn't have time to call her. Her parents wouldn't understand. You can guess the routine. And she leaves. We got a decent description of the boyfriend, but no name. And she didn't leave her name and address either."

"Then how can I . . .?" I started to ask.

"I know her. That is, I've seen her. She rides the same monorail home I do, most of the time. Come along this evening, and I'll point her out to you."

Me going to meet her was a little unusual but not that much. I hadn't had any real business in three weeks, and I needed to force some action. Unbending paper clips leaves the mind free to remember. Roseann.

So I told Phil O.K.

2.

Her skin was smooth bronze. Everything else was yellow. Hair, eyebrows, lips, fingernails, wraparound, purse and shoes. She wore that blank expression commuters insulate themselves with, but I thought I could see where an absence had dropped into the pools of her eyes leaving ripples of loneliness lapping and lapping.

In other words, her expression was exactly what my mirror showed me every day.

The hell with sentiment.

She was standing only a few feet from where I sat. I had to whisper to Phil. "You didn't tell me she was a monochrome."

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Phil shrugged. "She wasn't . . . this afternoon."

My eyes were wider when I looked back at her. A flasher, huh? That meant she had some individuality left. Not like Phil and the rest of the programmed, organized, managed mob. I decided I liked her.

I reached out and brushed her forearm. "Excuse me, miss," I said. "You look tired. Would you like to sit down?" I didn't want her to think I was offering simply because she was a good-looking woman.

She gave me a look that would have chilled the bubbles out of a pan of boiling water.

I could tell Phil was listening, and I needed the work.

"Please," I said, standing up. A burly, sweaty fellow in purple, orange and red swung toward the seat, and I had to block him out while trying to let Little Miss Monochrome Yellow in. Luckily, monorail nature abhors an empty seat as much as atom-and-flower nature abhors a vacuum. She slipped into it.

Before I could decide how to open her up, Phil turned to her and smiled his boiled macaroni smile. "Hi!" he said, in a bad imitation of spontaneous friendship. "Remember me?"

"Oh yeah," she said. "The cop with the big ears."

Phil flustered easily. "Well, sure I was listening. I couldn't help feeling sorry for you. I mean . . ."

"Phil's all heart," I said. "A damsel in distress will get him every time."

"But not you?"

I tried to put on a warm smile. "Sure. Me too."

"And you are . . . ?"

I handed her the card I'd already slipped between my fingertips. WILLIAM CHAPEL. PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR. Office address and terminal number, and a little slogan I didn't much care for: "Your Privacy Is My Business." Next set I had printed up I'd leave that off or add the word "Protecting" at the beginning.

I gave her long enough to look at the card and put two and two together. Then I asked, "Where can we talk?"

By now the sheep in the cattle car were beginning to smell wolves among them. A monochrome, a cop, and a dark-haired, plainly-dressed guy passing out business cards. Unusual and therefore frightening. A little clearing formed around us.

She hesitated but not for long. "My place?" she suggested loudly, challenging the sheep. I admired her nerve, asking a stranger into the privacy of her living quarters at least partly for the sensation she knew it would cause.

"Right," I said dramatically. If I'd had a mustache, I would have twirled it around my finger.

Phil got off at the next stop. It wasn't his.

3.

The old renovated brownstone building where she lived wasn't as secure as it might have been. We had to be let through only two locked gates, and it took her only five minutes to unlock her door.

The apartment was yellow and

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white. It took a while to notice the standard arrangement—small living room, smaller kitchen-dinette to the right, bedroom and bath to the rear—because yellow and white does things to your eyes. By the time I had it sorted out, she had two cups of water heating in the microwave and was standing in front of me.

"Coffee all right? I can't afford anything stronger."

"Sure." Living quarters were standard. Booze was not. She had only what the bureaucracy allotted her.

"Like it here?" I asked politely, sitting in a soft, yellow chair crisscrossed with thick, white lines.

"Oh yes," she said automatically. Then her composure tilted just a bit. "Though at first I missed my parents terribly. I know it's best for the economy that we all move out on our own at seventeen. Still...."

She looked like she was going to dissolve. The microwave summoned her and gave her a chance to pull herself together.

I looked at the small metal pictures scattered about on the walls. Yellow owls and birds and bridges and sunbursts. Yellow bugs and pyramids powdered her bookshelves and little white tables.

While I waited, casually, I picked up an inch-long yellow ladybug. It was heavier than I expected. I threw it up and down a few times in my palm. I dropped it. It came down and caught the edge of the table.

"Oops," I muttered, "sorry." I picked it up again.

The underside of the ladybug had been dented.

I stared at it. I bit it. I stared at it some more.

It was solid gold.

"Anything the matter?" She was walking toward me, a large yellow cup of steaming coffee in each hand.

I realized with a chill that I didn't know anything about this girl, not even her name. I had admired her courage in allowing a stranger like me into her apartment. Now I questioned my own good sense in allowing myself to be brought here. Alone.

She can't afford liquor, but her apartment has more gold in it than an Egyptian pharoah's unplundered tomb. Or an Arab's mouth. Or a politician's secret bank account. Or...

"Nothing," I answered, swallowing the one-liners. "I dropped your ladybug, that's all." I put it down without mentioning the dent or the gold. What she didn't know I knew, might keep me alive.

I accepted the coffee. She sat down.

"Well," she said taking a sip of her coffee. "How does one talk with a private investigator? Do I just ramble on, like you're a psychiatrist? Or do I sit back and answer questions, like you're a reporter?"

"Why don't we begin by introducing ourselves?" I suggested. "I showed you my card. And you are...?"

"I'm sorry. I assumed you knew. Kathy Francis."

"All right, Kathy. Why don't you tell me what you couldn't tell the cops the other day?"

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"I'm not a virgin, you know," she answered tersely.

"Is that important?"

"It is to me." She smiled. It wasn't an invitation.

I smiled back. "I suppose so. Is that what you couldn't tell them?"

Her smile hardened and shattered. "You're only asking questions."

"You're only stalling."

She stood up, walked nervously about the apartment. Her hair flowed in silent golden waves down her back. Roseann had always worn her auburn hair short, at her shoulders.

I waited quietly, trying not to nurse my grudge against the past. The Government had wanted a Hamilton Transmat receiver way out on Elgin's Planet, and Roseann had been one of those selected to take it there. So what if she wouldn't be back for twenty years? So what if when she got back she would have aged only four years while he had aged the full twenty? So what if they had decided that the age difference then would be too great to be fair to them or to any kids they might have had? She was free, he was free. The Government said it was as if they had never met.

Sure it was.

Why the hell couldn't Kathy have any scotch or bourbon?

She stalked over and sat back down. "You seem to be the only one I can talk to," she said. "I suppose I'll just have to tell you."

Swell, I thought. *Like all I need are your problems too.*

"Shoot," I said. "I'm Argus' uncle." I managed a little enthusiasm.

"What?"

"Argus was all eyes. I'm all ears."

"Oh." She leaned back and looked at me. "Are you really as hard-boiled as you talk?"

No, kid. But live long enough and you'll learn that sometimes a shell helps you survive. Even if it's only an eggshell.

"Tell me your problems. Maybe we'll get to mine later."

"All right." She took a big gulp of her cooling coffee and told me about it. Basically, it was what I already knew from Phil. Loneliness, a boy named Don Curtis to whom she had "proven" her love, a period of delirious happiness, a change in his behavior—fewer visits, fewer gifts, sulky, worried—then gone. Without a word, gone. She wanted to know where he was, that he was all right, that he wasn't in any trouble. Maybe he was unconscious in a hospital somewhere and needed her. Could I understand that she had found someone, had loved that someone, wanted that someone back? Could I understand that?

Roseann has gone relativistic among the stars. The physical laws of the universe are separating us in time and space. Your little bee has gotten all the honey he wants from your flower and has flown off to find another. Can I understand?

I guess not.

"You said something about his not bringing you as many gifts?" I tried not to look at the dented ladybug.

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She waved a careless arm about the room. "All these brass and bronze doo-dads," she said. "I couldn't afford such extras, but his job was making pick-ups and deliveries at a lot of curio and jewelry stores. When he saw something he thought I'd like, he'd get it for me."

I didn't ask the obvious question. She answered it anyhow.

"I'm sure he paid for them," she insisted with some anger. "He told me he got them at a discount out of his salary."

"The last time you saw him, did he seem upset?"

"No." She frowned. "But he had been very nervous about something for the past two weeks. I got the impression it was something to do with his job. And he stopped bringing these things." She nodded her head toward the walls, the bookcases, the tables with their golden freight.

"Did he say anything unusual, anything you didn't understand?"

"No, not that I recall. Oh, he did say something about lead shipments to Hamilton Transmat. I don't have any idea where he got that."

Probably meant nothing. Hamilton Transmat was too big to be involved in anything as insignificant as a delivery boy's disappearance. It would be like the U.S. Government moving to break up a neighborhood kid's 2¢ Lemonade stand.

"Did you ever make any visits to him at his place?"

"Look here Chapel, what sort of a girl do you think I am?"

"One who isn't a virgin anymore."

She glared at me for a moment, then shrugged. "I don't know where he lived, and he never gave me his terminal number. He wasn't being secretive or anything. He was gone most of the time, and having the number wouldn't have helped me."

She sounded like she believed it. Maybe it was even true.

I picked up an inch-and-a-half long turtle and turned it over. No label. No place of manufacture stamped into it. No way to trace it.

"Know the names of any of the places where he got this stuff?"

"A couple of times the boxes he brought them in were marked *The Metal Niche*. Another was *The Silver Sliver*. Then there was some jeweler. What was that name? Sphinx?"

"Alan Spink's. I've heard of it. O.K. I'll see what I can dig up on your boyfriend for you."

I stood up.

"By the way, Miss Francis, I'm in business for myself. I don't have to make much, but I have to make something. How about fifty now and thirty a day later, plus expenses?"

Her eyes didn't open quite as far as her mouth. "Mr. Chapel, you solicited me." I wasn't sure I liked her choice of words. "I assumed you were working with the cops—unofficially. I don't have anything to pay you with."

I began to feel dirty.

Then I saw a way to check out something I didn't quite believe. I reached for the ladybug and the turtle. "Maybe I could get something for

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these." I watched her without letting her know it.

She glanced around at all the other 'brass and bronze doo-dads' her missing boyfriend had given her. "All right," she agreed. "If you must."

She hadn't the slightest inkling that they were solid gold.

I slipped them into my purse, straightened my dark blue wraparound, and followed her to the first checkpoint. We didn't speak.

She looked at me as if she had just given me ten dollars for the orphan's picnic—knowing full well I'd take it to the corner bar.

It made me feel so bad I went to the corner bar.

4.

Alan Spink's is one of those places where the clerks wear black wraparounds with grey-striped collars. When they move, they leave a trail of slime on the floor. They rub their hands together in front of their chests as they ooze forward to see how much commission they can get from you. The faster they rub their hands, the more they think you're good for.

I must not have put enough grease on my hair that morning. As the clerk slithered toward me, he didn't rub his hands at all. He touched his manicured fingers in front of him and pursed his thin lips.

I hadn't gotten anywhere browsing *The Metal Niche* or *The Silver Sliver*. I decided to put it all on the table here.

The thin black mustache barely moved as the tiny mouth said, "May I help you with something?" Like finding your way to the door maybe?

I asked to see Mr. Spink.

He tried to smile. All he did was wrinkle his mustache. "I'm sorry, but Mr. Spink is..."

I took the ladybug from my purse and handed it to him. "Show him this." I couldn't tell if he recognized it or not.

"This is gold," he said, puzzled. "How did...?"

"Show Mr. Spink. I think he'll want to ask the questions."

He caved in. He carried the gold bug like it was real and he was squeamish. Two fingers and arm extended in front of his body.

I pretended to examine the letter openers. I didn't expect to find any of the gold items just lying around.

Alan Spink was a tall man. He could ride a giraffe and see over its head. His one candy-striped wraparound had enough material for three. His eyes were nearly as deep-set as his cheeks, and his nose nearly as pointed as his ears. His head was as smooth as the back of the ladybug that rested in the palm of his left hand. If the bug had been real, it would have had to crawl all day to reach the edge of the desert of that dull-brown palm.

"I understand you wanted to see me about this?" His deep, flat voice had a slight hiss, like the sound of water dripping on a hotplate.

My chin was so high in the air that it moved horizontally instead of vertically when I nodded.

"Step this way please."

My legs weren't long enough to step

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quite that way, so I merely followed several feet behind him.

Everything in his office was oversized. The off-white ceiling was high. The metal-and-mahogany desk was high. The chairs were high. I got so dizzy I began to think I was high.

Spink obviously liked to intimidate people. I decided I didn't like Mr. Alan Spink. I didn't like him at all.

At his signal, I sat up (not down) in a chair. I gave him one of my cards.

He smiled at the slogan, and I felt embarrassed. I decided to get a new set printed up tomorrow. Even if the old ones weren't used up.

That smile lingered on the edge of his expression like cotton candy spun on a knife.

"I should tell you," I said, "that several people know I'm here. Should anything happen to me...." I let the thought hang there. *What could possibly happen?* he would say.

Instead he said, "Of course," which meant a) I don't believe you, and b) so what? I began to suspect I was in trouble.

He leaned forward across the plain of his desk like a wind-bent tree. He set the tiny ladybug in front of me. He turned it slowly, with long deliberate fingers, until it faced me.

"This," he announced, "is stolen merchandise. About three months ago we lost an entire shipment. Where is the rest of it?"

Roseann was gone. I didn't really give a damn. I plunged in where angels fear to think about, much less tread.

"I got it from the apartment of a girl whose boyfriend had been giving her little trinkets just like it for a couple of months or more. He had your shipment squirreled away at his place. Dug in whenever he thought it would do him some good. I wonder what happens to delivery boys who make drops to themselves?"

"You think we found out about him and killed him." It was a statement, not a question. "You are a man of great courage to come here and tell me you believe that."

I shrugged. I don't know about other people, but my courage is inversely related to my love for life. Without Roseann...

"One of our 'delivery boys,' as you call them, has indeed been missing for the past five days. Don Curtis is of course the missing boyfriend you refer to. Mr. Chapel, would it do any good if I were to tell you that, like you, we do not know Mr. Curtis' whereabouts? We may be—indirectly—responsible for his disappearance. He is probably hiding because he is afraid we might find him and...punish him for stealing our goods. However, we have not...disposed of him."

"But why would he live so casually with the stuff for so long, then so suddenly get nervous and pull out?" The answer nuzzled up to me halfway through the question, and I let the tail end of it wag weakly as it fell along the ground.

"Why indeed?" He wasn't giving me anything. Well, I had paid my way in with a gold ladybug, so Spink knew I knew.

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I didn't hesitate. "He found out it was all pure gold."

"Such courage," Spink said. He lifted his right hand above the desk. It had a narrow little needlegun in it. I didn't know if it was loaded with sleepers or killers. I watched the muscles bunch around his fingers.

"Sleepers," I hoped out loud.

I fell toward the floor, but it evaporated and left a vast black empty nothing in its place.

So I fell into that.

5

The ceiling had one rectangular light recessed in it. It was a long way up. That was because I was lying on the floor. To my right and left were empty deep green metal shelves. Way back over my head was a small barred window high in a bare wall. Over my toes was a doorknob. It had a windowless door fastened to it.

I wobbled to my feet, rubbed the back of my moist neck with my hand, and then stood firm. Sleepers wear off quick once they start.

I tried the doorknob. Locked. I couldn't see anything but blue sky and thin sweeping clouds through the window. Daytime.

The shelving seemed solid everywhere. Then I found one loose angle-iron strut. A quarter fitted into the bolt's notch. A car key wedged the nut in place. Removing that end was easy. A little swinging of the strut loosened the other end. Soon I had a hefty piece of angle-iron nearly two feet long.

The man who finally walked in didn't learn till later what hit him. The second man knew right away, but for all the good it did him,couldn't do anything about it. Neither man was Spink. I couldn't have put him away by beating on his kneecap anyway.

The hall led to a door called EXIT, which in turn led to a small parking lot and a car with its engine running. Clearly those two hadn't expected to be gone very long.

I reached for the door handle and froze. A black arch of letters on the grey door read *Hamilton Transmat, Inc.* Arched the other way farther down on the door was *Williamson Research Labs.* Between the two were two vertical black rectangles connected by a stylized streak of lightning. Transmat senders and receivers.

I got in the car and tried to drive like I belonged there. My mind was churning wildly.

Most people thought Hamilton Transmat was bigger than NASA had been back in the 1960's. But it was so diversified that no one really knew. It got heavy funding from the Government, but even Senate Committees checking appropriations and expenditures hadn't dredged up a complete account of Hamilton Transmat's entire financing.

A gold ladybug scampered across the back of my mind.

Transmatting raw materials and finished products from market to market around the world had become almost routine the last ten years or so. Now sub-companies like Williamson Research were developing new ways to

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use Hamilton's matter transmitters. Sunday Supplement articles confidently predicted mass transmatting of people in the near future. "Every home will one day have its own Transmat. Automobiles, mass transit systems, air travel—all will be things of the past."

And Roseann had gone to near-light speeds to help put a Hamilton Transmat on Elgin's Planet, the first completely Earthlike, colonizable world mankind had yet discovered. Afterwards all inanimate matter—tools, instruments, machines, construction materials—could be transmatted out instead of hauled out. The lightships themselves could then carry many more people with each payload.

Why is it economically feasible? I wondered. Where does the energy to transmat over such distances come from, and how is it generated and how is it paid for?

Golden ladybugs and turtles crawled around golden pyramids.

I drove over a gentle rise between two barrackslike buildings with *Williamson Research Labs, 17A* and *17B* stenciled on closed double doors. A closed and guarded gate waited ahead. No fence stretched out to its right and left. Only the closed gate. A checkpoint for internal traffic. Not an exit. Someone in a uniform and a white helmet stepped out to meet me. Bored, routine.

I slowed down as I approached the closed gate.

I made up my mind.

As the blue-eyed guard with the holstered gun leaned over to chat with me, I stepped on the gas, swerved away from him, and careened the car around the checkpoint.

He never got his gun out.

The rearview mirror framed him for an instant: right foot inside the narrow shed, left arm reaching for the telephone within.

I left that place.

6.

The thin little day man at Curtis'apartment complex needed two things before he'd let me in. A call to Phil Green gave him the reassurance that I was who I said I was. I gave him the ten-spot out of my own pocket.

He took me to the Security Station on Curtis' floor—the sixth—pointed directions past the overweight guard on duty there, and went back to his all-important duties.

I punched the combination the day man had given me into the door's controls. It hiccoughed, and the door slid aside. I went into Curtis' room.

The cops hadn't sent anyone by because Curtis was not yet officially a missing person. The day man had said the last person in had delivered a large crate some five days before. So I was the first one in in five days. Spink had said Curtis disappeared five days ago.

The apartment had the same floor plan as Kathy Francis', and why not? Most floor plans were the same these days. Identical and identical and identical. Mass produced modules were cheaper. Mass produced people were

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easier to manage. Mass produced life was dull.

I let the door whisper shut behind me. At least what few furnishings there were were not so bizarre as Kathy's yellow-and-white optical illusions. A light-brown patternless threadbare carpet, not quite wall-to-wall. Dark brown wooden furniture with padded cushions and backs. Dark, empty, dusty bookcases.

I stepped through to the kitchen. A dirty plate. Two crumby saucers. Three cups with dried-out coffee in the bottoms. A handful of spoons, one greasy butter knife, and two forks. None of it had been used in days. More than five, probably.

Nearly empty refrigerator. Some brown wilted lettuce. The milk was almost empty, probably spoiled. I shrugged and let the door relax shut. You never could tell about milk. It always tasted funny if you thought it might taste funny. Bourbon never spoiled or tasted funny.

The bed had not been made up. A sheet and a blanket lay crumpled, halfway on, halfway off. I lifted them with my toe. Two sandals stared up at me. Well, most people had more than one pair of shoes.

The closet held three nondescript wraparounds, the drawers some underwear, socks, handkerchiefs. Depressingly normal.

The bathroom door wouldn't open. Or rather it swung open about six inches and quit. I leaned against it. Something heavy moved with the door as it opened. I stuck my head around the edge of the door.

His nude body was rolled into a stiff ball that lay on its side, back against the door. The needle from the needle-gun had gone in alongside his temple, had most of its energy taken from it, and had rebounded till it stuck half out behind his left ear, the one I was looking down at. There wasn't enough blood to mat the unkempt brown hair. The murder weapon wasn't there.

He had run to the bathroom, been shot as he entered it, died curled against his killer's entrance. Too late.

I sniffed the air. A faint odor in the cool air conditioning. The smell of putrefaction is like the taste of spoiled milk. It's there if you think it is.

There was no water in the tub. The plug was up. The faucet dripped slowly. A little round puddle formed where the plastic bowl met the pot-metal drain. The drip kept the puddle full without letting it get so full some water ran down the drain. Drip. Evaporate. Drip. Evaporate. Fascinating.

What a hell of a way to earn a living.

7.

Phil looked at me through his watery fish eyes. "O.K., so Spink hit you with a sleeper and kidnapped you. But that doesn't make him out to be Curtis' murderer."

"Phil, he knew Curtis held out a shipment. He knew Curtis had found out somehow it was all gold. He had to get rid of Curtis and he did."

"That's motive, but it's not proof. We need something that'll tie Spink to the killer."

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"You know who the killer was?"

"The last person in delivered that crate. Curtis was alive then because he okayed the entry. No one else went in, and he's been dead since then."

"So get that deliveryman and you've got your link with Spink." I winced at the end rhyme. "What was in the crate?"

"Don't know yet. Can't tell on the tape, and we're having someone check with the guy on duty to see what he is able to remember."

I walked across to a terminal, punched up the Security tapes for Curtis' complex, found the day and floor, watched as a small man kept a big box between himself and the TV monitor. I didn't expect to get a good look at him. I wanted to see the box.

Once I caught a blur at one of the upper corners. I stopped the frame, expanded it. A black rainbow arch of letters I couldn't read. Farther down, a second, inverted arch. Between them, two vertical black rectangles connected by that now familiar flash of bolt lightning.

I sat down and stared. The Hamilton Transmat logo again. What could Hamilton Transmat have to do with Don Curtis' murder?

I moved the tape on ahead. Just what I expected. The deliveryman carried the crate back out. He'd need it to block off the monitor again.

"Wrong address?" remarked the overweight guard I had seen.

"Wrong item," I think I heard the thin muffled voice say from behind the box.

The guard nodded and let him past the checkpoint and onto the elevator.

I ran the tape back and showed Phil the logo I had picked up. His mouth and eyes opened like they were wired together. It was the first time I'd ever heard anyone actually gasp. He didn't say anything, just stared.

I did the talking. "You can tell by the way he handled it that the crate's full, both ways. Till we know different, we have to assume that the killer carried a portable Transmat into and out of Curtis' apartment. And he didn't do it merely for protection against the TV monitor. An empty box would have done as well for that. No, the real question is, what did Curtis' killer do with the Transmat after he shot Curtis? What's missing?"

"The rest of the gold shipment?" Phil suggested.

"Maybe. Let's check something else." I located the records for power usage in Curtis' apartment that afternoon. At 3:07 a surge lasted nearly 43 seconds. Like an old-fashioned air-conditioner cutting in briefly.

"Well, that's it," I said. "Spink had him killed about three. Then the rest of the stuff was shipped out. Get the deliveryman and we've got the connection to Spink."

"We already called him in on your complaint. He'll be here soon. You can wait for him if you want."

No one had to go arrest Alan Spink. The cops called you in, you went. In today's monitored and regulated society, there's no place else to go.

I didn't want to, but I decided I had

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a calendar of upcoming events

log

1-3 FEBRUARY
WARCON 80 (Annual Southwest Wargaming Convention) at Memorial Student Center, Texas A-M Univ. Tournaments etc. Sponsored by GROMETS (A-M gaming club) Info: John Westover, Chairman, GROMETS, MSC Recreation, Box 5718, College Station TX 77844.

8-10 FEBRUARY
FORTCON II (Colorado SF conference) at Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colo. Guest of Honor—Fred Saberhagen. Fan Guest of Honor—Bob Alvis. Toastmaster—Ed Bryant. Registration $7. Huckster tables $15 plus membership. Info: FortCon, c/o Anti-Martian Society, Box 407 Student Center, Colorado State Univ. Fort Collins CO 80523.

15-17 FEBRUARY
BOSKLONE (New England Regional SF conference) at Radisson Ferncroft, Danvers, Mass. A somewhat scaled-down version of the Boskone (the worldcon is in Boston in 1980). Guests of Honor—Spider and Jeanne Robinson. Registration $7 until January 14, 1980, $10 at the door. No formal artshow or hucksters room (poolside selling) but most of the usual Boskone features. Info: Bosklone, NESFA, P.O. Box G, MIT Branch P.O., Cambridge MA 02139.

16-18 FEBRUARY
DunDraCon V (SF fantasy and role-playing game convention) at Villa Hotel, San Mateo, Calif. Figure and diorama competition, game tournaments, films, dealers, demos. Registration $8.50 until January 1, 1980, $10 thereafter and at the door. Info: DunDraCon V, 386 Alcatraz, Oakland CA 94618.

1 MAY
Deadline for entries in the Science Fiction and Fantasy Art Show (sponsored by the West Coast Comic Club) at the Mall of Orange, 2200 N. Tustin Ave., Orange, Calif. Info: 420 West 4th St., San Dimas CA 91773.

29 AUGUST-1 SEPTEMBER
NOREASCON TWO (38th World Science Fiction Convention) at Sheraton-Boston Hotel and Hynes Civic Auditorium, Boston, Mass. Guests of Honor—Kate Wilhelm and Damon Knight, Fan Guest of Honor—Bruce Pelz, Toastmaster—Bob Silverberg. Registration $30 until July 1, non-attending membership $8 at all times. This is the SF universe's annual get-together. Professionals and readers from all over the world will be in attendance. Talks, panels, films, fancy dress competition, the works. Join now and get to nominate and vote for the Hugo awards and the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer. Info: Noreascon 2, P.O. Box 46, MIT Branch Post Office, Cambridge MA 02139.

ANTHONY LEWIS

Items for the Calendar should be sent to the Editorial Offices, **four months** *in advance of the issue in which you want the item to appear.*

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to call Kathy Francis and tell her about her boyfriend. She had hired me. I had found him. Time to report to my employer.

She came on-screen right away.

When Roseann had had to tell me she was being sent out to Elgin's Planet and that it was over between us—that she was going out to stay young while I was staying home to grow old—she'd simply said it. Straight out. No softening. No pretending. Clear and simple.

"I found Don," I told Kathy. Her expression didn't change. She still hadn't spoken. "In his apartment. Murdered. But we know who did it and why. Why don't you come on down and make a statement for the cops. They'll need one."

Her lips parted slightly. She inhaled slowly for a long time. Then she nodded and broke the connection. She hadn't exhaled yet.

8.

While we waited for Alan Spink and Kathy Francis, I sipped some too-strong coffee and worried at Phil.

"Hamilton Transmat," I muttered. "Williamson Research Labs. That's the connection I can't get."

Phil shook his head slowly. He had nothing to suggest.

"Spink sleepers me, and I wake up at Williamson Research. Spink's hired killer carries a portable Hamilton Transmat in and out of Curtis' apartment the day he's murdered. And then there was something that Kathy Francis told me."

"What?"

"I was talking with her about Curtis. Had he said anything strange, out of the ordinary? And she says, 'Yeah, lead shipments to Hamilton Transmat.' Now what do you think that means?"

I reached across to a nearby terminal and began a retrieval program as Phil shrugged his bewilderment.

Lead shipments should be on the Public Record. But those to Hamilton Transmat came up Classified. I'd need a different program request to get the information, and I didn't have that different request.

I looked the question at Phil. He didn't have it either.

"I'll have someone get it for you though," he said.

Before he could act, the outer door opened and a man squeezed into the jumble of offices, desks and partitions. The uneven background hum of conversation and tapes drifted down to nothing. No doubt about it. Alan Spink was a commanding figure.

For one thing, he had commanded someone to kill Don Curtis.

Phil and I stood to meet him. I resisted the temptation to climb onto Phil's shoulders so I could look him in the eye. God, could he intimidate you! No wonder I disliked him so.

He didn't give us a chance to say anything. "An Interrogation Room," he demanded. Phil nodded. "Private. No tapes. Nothing on the record yet." Phil hesitated but ended up agreeing to that too.

We went into a broom closet of a room with only three chairs, each one

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facing the other two. Spink took out a small box, flipped a switch on it, and set it on the floor beside him as he sat down. A scrambler. Phil ignored it, closed the door, sat to Spink's left. I sat to his right.

"All right, Chapel, I sleepered you and had you sent to Williamson Research. You were too close to something too big, and it was all I could think to do. Maybe I was wrong. Maybe I should have handled it differently. But I wanted someone out there to talk to you, explain what was going on, convince you to lay off and stay away."

"Like you convinced Don Curtis." I made it a sarcastic remark instead of a question.

Spink waved an arm off to one side. "That's a whole other issue. Why drag it in?" Then he seemed to pick up something in my tone of voice. "You've found him?"

"Yep," said Phil. "In his bathroom. Murdered." He sketched in most of the details.

"Too bad. But I had absolutely nothing to do with it."

"We'll know more about that pretty soon," I said. "You see, your hired gun made one big mistake. He carried the crate so we could see the serial number on the side of it." What's a little white lie among enemies? "The cops already know where it came from and who it was sold to. Next they'll have our link between you and Don Curtis' murder." No harm in trying.

Spink was not alarmed. "There is no such link. Forget it."

The "white-lie" gambit just exploded in my face.

"We won't forget it for a while yet. Any more than I'll forget you sleepered and kidnapped me. Want to try to explain that away?"

"Mr. Chapel, you can be very irritating. I admitted doing both those things—for good reason."

"Name it."

He looked uneasy. "They told me to tell you, but we've kept it a secret for so long..." He was speaking as much to himself as to me.

"Who is 'they'?"

"Old Man Hamilton himself, for one. Naomi Williamson for another. And Murray Jenkins for a third."

Those were big names. Jenkins had become Director of Williamson Research when Williamson herself had developed terminal cancer. I hadn't even been sure she was still alive. No one had seen or heard of her in nearly two years.

"Go ahead," I urged, pretending I wasn't impressed.

Then another thought tip-toed across my mind. I grabbed it from behind before it could get away and threw it at Spink. "You might start with the lead shipments."

"Yes," he admitted. "All right. Williamson Research transmats lead in massive amounts."

I waited. Raw materials had been transmatted for a decade.

"Except...they only transmat the lead across the room."

Phil and I exchanged glances. "Why?" Phil asked.

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"The idea grew out of speculation concerning transmission losses. What would happen if you transmatted an atom of lead and lost some of it along the way?"

He seemed to expect an answer. I closed my eyes and tried to remember some high school chemistry. The Periodic Table. Lead = Pb. Atomic number, 82. Suppose you lose some of it in transmission...say a few electrons? Ionized lead. That couldn't be it. Suppose you lost some protons, too. That would drop the atomic number to 81, or 80, or...79?

Bingo!

My eyes shot open so far my eyelashes got tangled in my eyebrows. All I could see were ladybugs and turtles.

"You'd get gold," I said.

He nodded. "One application of a matter transmitter that no one had thought of before is the transmutation of elements. Lead has a heavier, more complex atom than gold. We turn each lead atom into a burst of energy and transmat it. In the receiver the incoming burst is split, with most of the energy allowed to go on to be reconstructed as an atom of gold."

"What happens to the energy that's split off and that would have formed the missing protons and electrons?" I asked, intrigued.

"Some of it is collected and stored so we can use it for the next transmutation. Some of it actually powers the process itself while it's underway. Most of it, though—we're talking about really massive amounts of energy here, you know—most of it has to be bound back into the form of matter, as very light elements."

Something from college physics still bothered me. "Wouldn't some of the reconstructed atoms be radioactive?"

Spink turned his palms up and shrugged. "You're getting in beyond me," he protested. "I'm a jeweler, not an atomic physicist, remember? I've heard there are radioactive by-products, but only among the very light, waste elements, never in the gold itself. The potato peeler—that's what the technicians call the device that pares the lead burst down into a gold burst—the potato peeler can be tuned so it always peels off just the right amount of energy to produce pure, nonradioactive gold. I dispose of that for them. I don't know who gets rid of the radioactive wastes, or how. That's not my line."

"Let me get this straight," Phil interrupted. "Lead is transmatted across the room. At the receiver you get gold, some slightly radioactive light elements, and energy. You use the gold to buy more lead and the energy to transmat that lead into gold." He frowned. "It sounds like perpetual motion."

"No," Spink replied. "You have to keep adding lead."

"You're a middle man," I said aloud, working it out, fitting the pieces all together. "You get the gold, shape it into ladybugs and turtles and rings, and you sell it through your chain of stores. That converts the gold to cash without destroying the market value

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of the gold."

Spink leaned forward, a new intensity informing him. "Exactly. And that's what you were too close to when I had to sleeper you in my office. If word of this gets out prematurely, it could destroy the gold standard, wreck the economy of the world. I wanted Jenkins to explain all this, get your cooperation. That's why I sent you to Williamson Research."

"Only I got away too soon."

"The point now is, you—both of you—must not breathe a word of what you know until Hamilton is ready to move. Otherwise..."

"Otherwise we get kidnapped, killed, what?"

"You're obnoxious when you've got that chip on your shoulder. All I was going to say was, otherwise, the world's economy—and with it civilization as we know it—falls apart. A personal threat means nothing beside a threat to the world." He looked at me more closely. "Or does it Mister Chapel?"

"You want us to keep quiet while Hamilton takes over, is that it?"

"No Hamilton Transmat, the U.S. Government, and the United Nations have all been working together on this. We've got a new technological device—the Hamilton Transmat—that can do things we haven't even thought of yet. It's going to revolutionize civilization on this planet. We couldn't wish it out of existence if we wanted to. Anyone who even suspects its potential wouldn't want to face the future without it. All we're asking you, now that you know about it, is that you let the leaders of the world decide on a plan for the evolution to a Transmat society. If they can't do it, you surely can't."

I didn't like Spink. I never had. But he was pretty damn convincing. What the hell could I do? I had no ideas for the peaceful incorporation of the Hamilton Transmat into world civilization. Isn't that what governments and their leaders are for?

I thought of Don Curtis' body curled heavily against the door of his bathroom, a needle in his temple.

"Uh-oh," I said, and ran to the nearest terminal.

I had remembered it right.

"We know who did it and why," I had said to her. "Why don't you come on down and make a statement for the cops?"

I felt nausea begin to churn and roil in my stomach.

9.

We talked about it halfheartedly on the way over.

"When she denied knowing where he lived," I said, "that was the dead giveaway. She knew his name, knew what he looked like. She'd get his address from a public terminal in the exact same way I did."

"And it was stupid of us not to check for stolen Transmats. When a pair disappears from right next door to where she works...." Phil didn't have to go on.

"She was going to transmat the body out. Make it seem like he had voluntarily run away. Only he died

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wedged against the door, and she couldn't get him out of the bathroom and into the Transmat."

"The transmission she did make was to get rid of the needlegun, the murder weapon. She couldn't risk walking out with it."

We were still shaking our heads at one another in the elevator on the way up to Kathy's apartment.

"She thought he had used her and was throwing her over," I said. "She couldn't stand that. She didn't believe it was worry about his job, about the shipment. Even when he told her it was solid gold, she didn't believe him. She was too hurt."

Phil joined in the litany of error and omission. "She didn't come to Public Security to get our help in finding him. She knew where he was. She wanted to know if we had found him yet. She was too scared to wait it out."

The elevator stopped. The door opened. We passed through the familiar checkpoint. Where I'd felt so guilty earlier leaving with the ladybug and the turtle. And her eyes watching.

Now the guilt was worse. *"We know who did it and why. Why don't you come on down and make a statement for the cops?"* She would assume she was under arrest, that we had found her out. And in her state of mind....

The two stolen Hamilton Transmats had been placed neatly in the center of the living room. A needlegun rested on one of them. Alongside the other one—the one she had stepped off of—fastened by a pajama cord to the light fixture in the ceiling, dangled the beautiful young body of Miss Kathy Francis.

I had been wrong about so many things. Why couldn't I have been wrong about this too?

Then the body jerked. It turned slowly till I could see terrified eyes blinking from a purple face.

I leaped up on a Transmat and lifted till the pressure on her neck was relieved. Phil jerked the pajama cord loose. We lost our balance and fell to the floor. Kathy lay swallowing and swallowing.

I sat up and looked at Phil. "She'll be all right." He nodded, rubbing his shoulder as he rose.

"Why didn't you let me alone?" Kathy asked. Her voice squeaked. I could tell she'd substituted "alone" for "die." She couldn't say "die." Not about herself.

"You don't have any more right to take your own life than you had to take Don's," I told her. It sounded pompous and moralistic even to me. I couldn't look at her.

"Why not?" she insisted.

I didn't know, so I didn't say anything. Phil did though. "Because it's against the law," he said.

She turned her face into the carpet. "The law just wants to kill me itself."

I gave up. "You handle it," I told Phil. I left without saying goodbye to Kathy. I'd done my job. I'd learned who did it, and why. The rest was none of my concern.

But I still wished I had Roseann to go home to. ■

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THE ALTERNATE VIEW

BIOCYBERNETICS REVISITED

G. HARRY STINE

When Jerry Pournelle and I started to write these columns as a vis-a-vis experiment, we hoped that sooner or later one of us would write something that the other would tee-off on and thus get a good controversy going that would present "alternate views." It hasn't worked out that way because Jerry and I have discovered that we think very much alike on most matters. We have not been able to stir up controversy between one another. But we *did* stir up controversy among the readers!

When I wrote the columns on biocybernetics in the May and July 1979 issues, my objective was nothing more or less than science reporting with some synthesis included. I wanted to point out that a true interface between human brains and electronic computers was not only possible but that the basic experiments had been done and the foundation technologies already existed, albeit in the case of the Flanagan neurophone the data had been generally unknown for 16 years. I reported on the basis of what I knew *at that time*. I requested that no one write for additional data because I didn't have any additional data *at that time*. I do now.

These two columns have resulted in an inordinate amount of mail from readers, which makes the editor happy because he knows people are reading this. Some of the letters were anticipated, some were not. Some were from people who were deaf and wanted the Flanagan neurophone at any price. Others wanted the neurophone to use in attempts to contact loved family members in a coma. There were the usual letters from cranks. There were letters from companies wanting to manufacture the neurophone. There were letters from Ph.D.'s who should know better than to make some of the statements they did. And I got letters with real up-to-date information.

I discovered that Dr. G. Patrick Flanagan is alive and well and living 125 miles from me!

That's an hour's flight in my Cherokee, so I went to see Pat on July 26, 1979. We spent the day together on his 15-acre ranch in his office and laboratory. I now have enough material for a number of articles once I study and digest it all.

For the benefit of those who are interested, you may reach Dr. G. Patrick Flanagan at P.O. Box 18224, Tuscon AZ 85731. Or telephone him at

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(602)749-4012—no collect calls, please.

You may obtain copies of his two neurophone patents by writing to the U.S. Patent Office and ordering Patent No. 3,393,279 granted July 16, 1968 and Patent No. 3,647,970 granted March 7, 1972.

The rights to Patent No. 3,393,279 are owned by Intelectron, Inc. of New York City. The FDA will not permit it to be marketed because it uses a low-frequency r-f carrier, and they are very sensitive these days about the biological effects of r-f radiation.

But Pat Flanagan is an inventor. With his original patent rights in the hands of another company and with an FDA ban on its production, Flanagan developed the second neurophone device covered by Patent No. 3,647,970 which does *not* use an r-f carrier and does *not* involve high voltages. At the behest of the Department of Defense, the Department of Commerce placed Flanagan's new device under secrecy order No. 756,124 dated August 28, 1968. Flanagan was able to get this secrecy order rescinded in 1972 to permit the patent to be issued.

I sat in Flanagan's study and listened to the new neurophone on July 26, 1979. It works even better than the original one. It operates from eight Type AA alkaline pen-light cells. The audio signal is double-differentiated and converted to a 60-volt square wave which is then run through a zero crossing detector. The sensor electrodes are one-inch diameter plates made from lead zirconium titanate insulated on one side with epoxy that also seals the attachment of the lead from the neurophone.

With one electrode placed on the soft skin of my calf and the other on my chest, I *heard* the audio information from the tape recorder input *in my head*. I listened to both speech and music, and the fidelity was outstanding. I had a cassette tape recorder running two feet from me while this was going on; there is no evidence of the audio information recorded on the cassette by the recorder; I was the only entity hearing the neurophone, and it was therefore not producing any sound waves that the microphone of the recorder could pick up.

As I knew 17 years ago, the Flanagan neurophone works. I don't give a doodly-damn what all you bloody experts out there have presumptuously stated in your outraged fan letters to me. I am forced to repeat the immortal words of Dr. J. C. Warren voiced after performing the first surgery with a patient under ether anesthetic administered by Dr. William Thomas Green Morton in Boston on October 16, 1846:

"Gentlemen, this is no humbug!"

For the benefit of all of you who wrote to me, I gave your letters to Flanagan. There is no need for me to be in the loop. There is no need for Flanagan to defend himself nor does he need help in doing so; he has a device that works. In the eyes of some sober, respected academicians, Flanagan is perhaps flamboyant and *different*, but that must not be allowed to detract from the fact that he is a successful inventor and, in common with many

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others of his unconventional and free-wheeling nature in the history of science and technology, working on the fringes of scientific research in areas that others can't or won't touch.

The most fascinating aspect of this whole affair has been the confirmation and terrible realization that the human race apparently has not progressed beyond the state of affairs a century ago when "legitimate" scientists dug in to defend their sacred turf...and made damned fools of themselves in the process. They also retarded the development of technology that would have relieved human suffering and generally improved the human condition. These scientific brahmins still exist; they are no different from the predecessors of a hundred years ago; and they exhibit an appalling lack of knowledge and understanding of the history of their own field of expertise!

Arthur C. Clarke's law is still very much in force.

Jerry Pournelle was 100% correct in his June 1979 "The Alternate View."

I would like to extend my profound thanks and grateful appreciation to those scientific brahmins who wrote to me and to the editor about the neurophone and the human-computer interface. You have greatly contributed to the contents of my "Utter Bilge" file. This is my collection of presumptuous statements from people who should know better than to make such statements in the first place. The file's title derived from the infamous statement of Sir Richard Van Der Riet Wolley: "Space travel is utter bilge!"

Scientific research and technical progress is not and never has been the exclusive turf of any select group of people. There has always been a role for the amateur investigator, and it still exists today. Before the "official" establishment of any new area of scientific endeavor, everyone who works in that area must, by definition, be an amateur. Even in the established fields of scientific endeavor, important discoveries have been made by amateur investigators. Good scientists—and I have the pleasure of knowing many—would never reject out of hand any amateur findings and will react with enthusiasm and interest to such findings. It is only poor scientists who are insecure that will react negatively. Would there were more good scientists!

Bioelectronics today is in about the same situation as electricity about a century ago. The field is ripe for experimentation. Certainly there is danger; there always is. But that is no reason for suppressing information, as one Ph.D. correspondent demanded be done, for fear of someone electrocuting himself by building a neurophone in his basement shop. People still get hurt in steam boiler explosions. As a matter of fact, people still get burned handling the ancient technology of a campfire. These accidents merely strengthen the statement of Herbert George Wells, "History is a race between education and catastrophe," but down on the personal level.

To paraphrase Harold Laski, science by experts means, after a time, science in the interest of experts. ■

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by Spider Robinson

THE REFERENCE LIBRARY

The Cosmic Rape, **Theodore Sturgeon, Gregg, 231 pp., $8.50**
Venus Plus X, **Theodore Sturgeon, Gregg, 160 pp., $8.50**
Too Many Magicians, **Randall Garrett, Gregg, 260 pp., $12.50**
The Golden Helix, **Theodore Sturgeon, Dell, pages & price unknown**
The Stars Are the Styx, **Theodore Sturgeon, Dell, pages & price unknown**
Star Rangers, **Andre Norton, Fawcett, 223 pp., $1.75**
The Road to Corlay, **Richard Cowper, Pocket, 239 pp., $1.95**
Silverlock, **John Myers Myers, Ace, 516 pp., $2.50**
The Star-Spangled Future, **Norman Spinrad, Ace, 416 pp., $2.25**
Retief Unbound, **Keith Laumer, Ace, 343 pp., $1.95**
The End of Summer, **ed. Malzberg & Pronzini, Ace, 320 pp., $1.95**
The Cave of Time, **Edward Packard, Bantam, 128 pp., $1.25**
Some Will Not Die, **Algis Budrys, Dell, 159 pp., $1.95**
The Red Limit, **Timothy Ferris, Bantam, 204 pp., $2.25**
The Sexual Connection, **John Sparks, Sphere, 191 pp., $1.95**
Alien

OLD FRIENDS AND SURE THINGS

What's new, you ask? Well, actually, not a whole lot.

I know, I know, there are more new SF titles being published lately than ever before, and you want someone to guide you safely through the minefield (mindfield?). The thing is, there are more *old* SF titles being published lately than ever before—and I've got minefields of my own, thank you.

You see, I spent the last month or so on the road.

I love Halifax, my home. I leave it reluctantly, for it is a beautiful and historic and easygoing city, and I am a notorious stick-in-the-mud. I leave it especially reluctantly in the summer, when, as they say, humans can live unprotected on its surface. But there are many benefits to travel. I can see new movies and old friends, find a whole record store entirely devoted to jazz, buy fresh Jamaican coffee beans at a corner deli. I can eat in some incredible restaurants. (Halifax has no shortage of incredible restaurants.

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What it has a shortage of is editors, publishers and convention committees to pick up the check.) I can read newspapers that actually contain world news, walk the streets without being recognized (recognized by the Vice Squad, I mean), take a cab downtown to see Chick Corea, and regale new audiences with anecdotes that everyone back home has already heard a dozen times.

On the other hand, there are disadvantages. It always seems to be crazy out when I get there. All the roads are full of cars, and all the cars are full of angry people. My friend in Toronto tells me there is no news on his sister, who vanished off the streets on the way home from a party many months ago. The security guard at the A&W Root Beer joint in Queens carries a .357 Magnum, and looks as if he is aching to use it. (He is not. That's just the way he has to come on to get respect in that neighborhood.) You have to remember to lock all the windows when you go out, and put the tape deck under the front seat when you get out to put air in the tires. You grow nerves right through your pants into your wallet. You dare not get sick. There are no goddamned parking spaces. (And, in the States, not enough gas to keep circling the block.)

And so whenever I travel I get a little crazy. And whenever I get a little crazy, my *reading-need,* the intensity of my print-addiction, rises sharply. I gotta have a fix. More important, it must be a *good* fix, stuff that hasn't been home-cooked or stepped on, for *sure.* After a day of coping with the pressures of nomadic existence in North America, I do *not* want to get frustrated in my leisure hours.

So when I'm packing for my annual ramble, I do not waste precious suitcase space on anything but Old Friends and Sure Things.

Wherefore those dedicated, longtime, hardcore fans who've read *everything* and don't believe in rereading can probably skim this column lightly. Only four books on this month's list are totally new, original, never-before-available-anywhere stuff. A good third of them are classics, and although nearly half of them were new *to me,* in only one or two cases was I taking a gamble.

Come to think of it, even you oldtimers may be interested. *I* certainly have no objection to replacing a tattered old paperback for a new edition. The cover-paintings are usually equiawful (a technical term I just coined); and I can lend out the old copy without worrying about its return.

And those of you who do *not* recognize most of what follows (the majority, I think) can rest assured that you've been M*I*S*S*I*N*G S*O*M*E*T*H*I*N*G.

I always try to pack sparingly. I *know* that I'll be acquiring books on the road, some of them even fit to read. And I don't like hernias, so I pack only paperbacks. Except this time I included three hardcovers.

All Gregg Press editions. I love 'em. I love to show them to people and rhapsodize about them. I love to hold them in my hands and smell them. They are not just hardcovers; they are hard-*bound.* You know, sewn with thread and that, the way they used to bind all books in prehistoric times. They're printed on acid-free paper, which won't yellow or rot without a

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struggle. If I can just remember not to set my bookshelves on fire, these books should all outlive me by a fair piece. All Gregg Press fiction titles are reprints, of books which the test of time has proven to be either terrific or "important" or both. There are no dust jackets; these ladies don't have to paint their faces to draw the yokels. (Hmmm...that might be construed as sexist. Let's invert it: "These gentlemen don't have to get tatooed to impress the broads." No, let's leave it like it was.)

And they're startlingly inexpensive books. The pricing varies, apparently pegged to rarity. For instance, Sturgeon's *Cosmic Rape* and *Venus Plus X* are both available in paperback (Pocket Books and Dell, respectively): the Gregg editions cost $8.50. (For another 45¢ you can buy the average contemporary hardcover, printed on Scott towels glued into cardboard with a garish wrapping that grossly misrepresents the contents.) Randall Garrett's *Too Many Magicians,* which was previously published in book form but is out of print, will set you back $12.50; whereas *The Science Fiction Stories of Walter M. Miller, Jr.,* available nowhere else in book form, will cost you $15.

Those first three are the titles I took with me on the road, and I enjoyed them all. If, hypothetically, I had been forced to sell two of them to buy a gallon of gas, I'd have dithered awhile and then kept **The Cosmic Rape.** (Fortunately no such drastic course was necessary; I simply took out two mortgages on my firstborn and robbed a medium-sized bank.)

(Economy's so bad the place was called The Last National Bank.)

I must rate *The Cosmic Rape* as Theodore Sturgeon's second-best SF novel. (*More Than Human* being the unquestioned best. So far.) *Venus Plus X* is perhaps better known, and certainly more highly critically regarded (in some circles, as we shall see), and I have never quite understood this. *Cosmic Rape* is one of those books so ambitious, so successfully ambitious, that it is very hard to discuss it without giving away too many surprises to those unfamiliar with it. I guess I can safely tell you that it is about an enormous star-hopping alien entity that sets out to make all mankind mutually telepathic—so we may be more easily "digested." If by some chance you do not own a copy, and you have $8.50 to spare (or $1.50 for the paperback), you are one lucky child.

I first read it perhaps fifteen years ago, and upon this rereading I was startled to discover how much of it I had memorized. An example at random—a description of a roadside dinner for five, whose box was accidentally stored on end:

> "It took a moment for his eyes to orient, as sometimes happens with an unexpected close-up on a TV screen: what *is* that? and then he found himself looking down on what looked like the relief map of some justifiably forgotten, unwanted archipelago. In a sea of cold curdled milk and tomato juice was a string of hamburger islands on whose sodden beaches could be seen the occasional upthrust prow of a wrecked and sunken dill pickle. Just under the surface blueberries bobbed, staring up at him like tiny cataracted eyeballs. Over to the

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northeast, a blunt island of rice pudding gave up its losing battle and, before his eyes, disappeared under the waves."

(For fifteen years I have wondered why he broke metaphor with those "cataracted eyeballs." Couldn't the berries have been, say, "unswept mines"?)

Now, the version of *Cosmic Rape* published in paperback in August 1958 was a very slim novel—perhaps this is why the critics sneer? It isn't windy enough?—clocking in at just under 45,000 words (standard is 60,000 on up). So to fill out the book Gregg added the 25,000-word novelette version published in the January 1958 *Galaxy* as "To Marry Medusa," along with an introduction by Samuel R. Delany that is alternately as opaque as a Slaver stasis box and as pellucid as a General Products hull. It is fascinating to compare the two versions, especially in the light of Delany's intro. He asserts flatly that Sturgeon must have written the shorter version first, and he marvels at Ted's terrific padding job. Whereas I am convinced Ted wrote the novel first and had to cut it drastically for *Galaxy*—on the evidence of the texts themselves and of their publication dates (a book often takes up to two years from point-of-sale to publication; magazine novelettes average much less).

Venus Plus X is a full-sized novel (circa 70,000 words), and as I said earlier, far better known. Again I am loathe to describe the plot, for like *Rape* it is one of those books almost impossible to discuss without spoiling too many surprises. Perhaps I can sufficiently whet your interest (or at least not bore it up too much), by quoting Ted's postscript: "It was my aim in writing *Venus Plus X* a) to write a decent book b) about sex." Or, as the excellent intro by Paul Williams quotes Ted as saying in an interview, "It was an effort made to examine our culture from an almost totally new perspective; and always with an emphasis on this business of sexual differentiation, and the way we treat each other because of it."

It is almost incumbent on me as a reviewer to be astonished at how little this book has dated, to be startled that a twenty-year-old examination of sex and sexual differentiation in society has not been rendered utterly quaint by, successively, sexual and feminist revolutions. But to be perfectly honest, I'm not surprised at all. Twenty years ago, when I read this book for the first time, I knew that Theodore Sturgeon was at least twenty years ahead of his time.

The book tells two stories side by side, one narrative, the other episodic, and lets you draw your own conclusions as to how they are related. The story with narrative drive takes place in a utopia where there literally *is* no sex difference, and deals with the reactions of a normal human to that utopia. There are interpolated segments set in 1960 American suburbia, and it is there that some of the dialogue, especially slang, is a bit dated. I don't mind that; it's set in 1960 America, it's *supposed* to sound dated. What I do mind is that some of it is just a bit too damned cute. I wish, for instance, that Ted's characters didn't say things like "verse vicey" for "vice versa." However, there are people who do say verse vicey, and I don't see that we can reasonably ex-

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clude them from literature without tangling with the ACLU.

Few books have ever gotten such a mixed reaction from the critics. Fred Pohl and Larry Janifer loved it, P. Schuyler Miller was a little disappointed, and Alfred Bester was nearly incoherent with rage. It must be admitted that the book is essentially a long lecture dressed up to look like a novel—but in my opinion it is superbly dressed. Ted uses language so beautifully that I will allow him to lecture me. The first time I read *Venus* my feelings were closest to Miller's: excellent technical structure, gimmick ending, a little disappointing. The second time, last month, I was no longer expecting it to entertain me, and I had a lot better time.

One thing I should point out: if you've read Ted's *Dangerous Visions* novelette, "If All Men Were Brothers, Would You Let One Marry Your Sister?", the ending will sound a bit familiar—albeit with a definite twist.

Enough of this praising with faint damns. I enjoyed my rereading—but perhaps you should check out the paperback version before deciding if you want a permacopy of this on your shelves. Me, I want Ted's entire output in permanent hardcover, but that's just my taste. (*Cosmic Rape*, on the other hand, I heartily recommend to one and all as being worth $8.50 sight unseen.)

Entertainment is the strong point of Randall Garrett's **Too Many Magicians**, entertainment made of equal parts of delightful humor and demonic cleverness. It is the only novel in Garrett's series of tales concerning Lord D'Arcy and Master Sean, to which no regular Analog reader needs any introduction. If you just got off the starship, the Lord D'Arcy series takes place in an alternate world in which Richard the Lion-Heart did *not* die at Chaluz and the Plantagenet line descended unbroken to contemporary times. In this world-line, the science of magic was developed and codified at the expense of the physical sciences: Lord D'Arcy solves murders, and Master Sean is his forensic sorcerer.

Each murder-mystery is shot through with puns and wordplay, and that is not the way to make an enemy out of me. (Well, not exactly; the success of a pun is in the *oy* of the beholder.) *Too Many Magicians,* which was first serialized in these pages (well, pages very like these), from August to November of 1966, is perhaps the most ingenious of them all. It certainly has an inviting premise: a locked-room murder has taken place at a magicians' convention (which hilariously resembles a contemporary scientists' convention). Was it done by guile or by magic? *Magicians* was nominated for the Best Novel Hugo in 1967, and had the misfortune to be up against *Babel-17, Flowers for Algernon,* and the winner, *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress.*

The Gregg edition of *Magicians* contains a rather incisive intro by Sandra Miesel, discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the series: plainly she knows Lord D'Arcy and Randall Garrett well. (Oddly, someone placed after this a listing of "Books by Randall Garrett" containing exactly one other title.)

The rest of the Lord D'Arcy stories are available in paperback in *Murder & Magic* (Ace). By the time you read these words, Garrett should be pretty

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well recovered from a recent hospitalization that nearly lifted his ticket, but he probably wouldn't suffer from a get-well card or two (unless you're the sort of dolt who sends a get-well card soliciting a reply), even at this late date. Send them care of Analog.

Buy *Too Many Magicians* first; then you'll be able to tell him how much you liked it.

Some sure things:

If there is anything more bothersome to pack than a hardcover, it is a set of unbound galley proofs. They bulk twice as large, and the only feasible way to hold them together is with a rubber band, which invariably breaks. Even *worse* are pre-galleys for a story collection—that is, a pile of xeroxes (xerices?) of the original magazine publications of the stories. They're not even as legible as galleys, and when the rubber band does break, there isn't even a consistent system of pagination to help you reassemble the mess. Nonetheless I brought *two* such disorderly heaps on the road with me, and can report that they were emphatically worth the trouble.

You see, they're both *new* Theodore Sturgeon collections.

You would think that by the time a writer has published eighteen collections of short stories and been anthologized a few hundred times, most of his best stuff would be pretty well picked over—especially since those eighteen collections have a significant amount of title overlap, and the same stories seem to keep getting anthologized over and over ("Microcosmic God," for example, has been anthologized at least seven times.)

And yet in the past year Dell has managed to publish *three booksfull* of previously uncollected Sturgeon, without coming anywhere *near* the bottom of the barrel (this notwithstanding the fact that the bottom of Ted's barrel contains more quality than most writers have in the top of theirs). The three books are *Visions and Venturers* (which I've reviewed elsewhere) and the two I brought on my trip, **The Golden Helix** and **The Stars Are the Styx**, and their publication is one (three?) of the major events of the decade as far as I'm concerned.

According to Contento's *Index of Science Fiction Collections and Anthologies* (an indispensible reference source from Gregg; see my last Analog column for details), *Helix* and *Styx* contain only four stories between them that you could possibly own in a less-than-twenty-year-old edition—one of them has not seen print in thirty-two years. (Oddly, one of the stories in *Helix*, "The Skills of Xanadu," *does* appear in a recent—well, eight-year-old—Sturgeon collection, *Worlds of*; and one, "Yesterday was Monday," was just reprinted last year in the antho *Unknown*—which was edited by one of Dell's two SF editors, Don R. Bensen!) But what impresses me most is that if I were forced to rate all of Ted's twenty-one story collections in terms of overall story quality, all three of these new books from Dell belong in the top third. Without question, *Helix* and *Styx* were the most enjoyable reading of my trip.

As with the Sturgeon novels earlier mentioned, if I were forced to choose only one, I would hesitate for a long time. Eventually I think I'd settle on *Helix*, because it contains the title story and "The Man Who Lost the

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Sea," and "And Now the News..." and "The Clinic," and "And My Fear Is Great," and no finer stories than those exist. If you don't know them, I don't care if you're broke: borrow some money. And if you don't know "Granny Won't Knit," "When You're Smiling," "The Claustrophile" or "The Stars Are the Styx," the same applies for the other book. SF just doesn't come better.

It is interesting to contemplate that there are still a minimum of fifteen uncollected Sturgeon stories lying around...

Another Old Friend. **Star Rangers**, under its original title, *The Last Planet*, was the first Andre Norton book I ever read; the first of many. I was six at the time. It was the first book I ever read involving telepathy. It was also the first book I ever read dealing with the concept of prejudice —in this case, prejudice against nonhumans—my first experience with the concept of second-class citizenship. I guess what I'm trying to say is that this book was so seminal for me that it is extremely difficult for me to be anything like objective about it now. But my recommendation would certainly be higher if I had not reread it first.

For one thing, it is now apparent to me that the ending surprise which knocked me on my can at the age of six was one of the hoariest clichés of SF even then—when I served (briefly) as slushpile reader for *Galaxy* twenty years later, I saw the same ending on the average of twice a minute. I don't think any adult reader could fail to spot it coming by page twenty.

There are other clichés,dying Galactic Empires and space pirates and patrol rangers with blazing blasters and such. The nonhuman second-class citizens are referred to as "bemmies," just a bit too cutely derived from Bug-Eyed Monsters. There is some slightly stiff dialogue in spots. It is "only an adventure," as they sneer, about a shipful of Space Rangers, human and bemmy, who are shipwrecked on a habitable world well off the star charts. They find there the survivors of a crashed passenger ship, led by a politician who hates bemmies and has mutant mind powers, and the plot proceeds to thicken.

All this notwithstanding, I enjoyed rereading it. I like the hero, Sergeant Kartr, an experienced Ranger and a "sensitive" of unsuspected power, who has never really come to terms with the fact that his home world, Ylene, was "burned off." I like the villain, Joyd Cummi, the mutant Arcturian; although he starts out pyoor eevul, by the end he has become a human being. I especially like the scenes of telepathic combat between Kartr and Cummi and the disgusting Can-Hound, and I think I could quote you verbatim the scene where Kartr's mindblock fails.

I don't know. Are the characterizations really as vivid as they seem to me, or is that the echo of a six-year-old's imagination, which needs so little to work with? Is the story as absorbing as it seems, or is that deja vu? I'm not certain. All I know is, I have known Kartr and Zinga and Fyll and Joyd Cummi for twenty-four years now, and it was a pleasure to meet them again. If you know a young reader you want to turn on to SF (and if you don't, *why don't you*), try him or her on this one.

I was prepared to love **The Road to**

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Corlay, and ended up liking it.

I was predisposed to love it. I loved its opening segment, which ran in *Fantasy & Science Fiction* as "Piper at the Gates of Dawn," despite the fact that it was competing with a story of mine for Best Novella Hugo at the time. In my secret heart of hearts I expected to lose to it; Cowper put me strongly in mind of a British Edgar Pangborn, and his future-world reminded me powerfully of Edgar's *Davy*-cycle.

So when I learned that Cowper's new paperback *Corlay* incorporated "Piper" as its opening, I put it in the suitcase straightaway. The proposition that a strong novella can be the seed of a great novel will get no argument from me (I've tried it twice myself). I wanted to hear more about Cowper's after-the-collapse world.

Indeed, the portions of the book which take place then and there are wonderful stuff. Oh, I missed old Peter the Tale-Spinner, whom I had assumed would reappear, resented his dying offstage—and more important, I'm not sure that after-the-collapse England would quite so closely resemble England past. But Cowper can write fluently and evocatively, and I care less whether a fictional world is realistic than whether it is real-seeming; his is vivid and rich.

Unfortunately, he interpolates chapters set in *contemporary* England, involving a scientific study of Out Of Body Experiences. Yep: the intrepid volunteer finds himself flash*forward*ing, accidentally reanimating the body of a drowned man in the future. We alternate between the present, with his wife and friends trying to revive his comatose body, and the future, in which the person whom he now thinks he is (his own personality is somewhere on hold, apparently) is struggling to overthrow the tyranny of Holy Mother Church. Eventually the present-day friends devise a magic machine which converts his coma-dreams into visual images (no sound, oddly) and they figure out where his soul has went. There still is nothing they can do about it except hope he wakes up. The "scientific explanations" of all this are thin and unconvincing, and Cowper never does get around to explaining *why* the polar icecaps melted and destroyed civilization in the first place.

In fact, I think I just put my finger on one reason why the present-day co-plot is a dreadful error. Give me a colorful enough future world, populate it with colorful enough people, and especially keep the story moving, and I will suspend large amounts of disbelief with pleasure. I will forbear to ask why civilization ended everywhere when it ended in England, why everybody didn't simply move inland when the water-level started rising (surely Cowper doesn't think icecaps melt overnight?), and what, hundreds of years later, ever happened to Europe. I will gladly suppress these and other quibbles because, I guess, I somehow expect a colorful and romantic future world to exist in a vacuum. (When you think about it, this world exists in a vacuum.)

But if you keep yanking me back into the present, and particularly a clumsily-drawn present in which scientists can get video from a brain but not the much simpler audio (they don't even try subvocalization), and *particularly* a *dull* present in which we repeatedly see a group of people

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watching a sleeping man, you only keep forcefully reminding me that there is no plausible way to get to that colorful and romantic future world, from here or anywhere.

And now I'm going to put my finger on the *main* reason why the co-plot is an error, and this involves a SPOILER WARNING! IF YOU DON'T WANT TO KNOW HOW IT ENDS, SKIP TO THE NEXT REVIEW! SPOILER WARNING! Because when, at the very end of the book, the personality of the comatose time-tripper emerges from wherever it's been and has a chance to accomplish something—nothing happens. It takes one whole page to not happen. When the future-hero has again been mortally wounded and only another shot of psychic juice from the present-hero can save him, when the fey heroine reaches out telepathically and begs the scientist to save her lover, he says, in essence, "I'm sorry, I'm very tired, I have to be getting back to my wife," and returns to his original body and worldline. We are left with a dead hero. The subplot was pointless and a waste of time. (Unless Cowper just wanted to raise false hopes? If so, why?)

So why, given all this, did I like *Corlay*? Why am I recommending you buy it and black out the present-day segments with a laundry marker? Because Richard Cowper is a superb storyteller, and he can write like an enchanted son of a bitch. I stored up objections, yeah, but I kept on turning the pages because I wanted to know *what happened to the people*? All of them, in that imaginary world, even the walk-ons and cameos. Like I said, a British Edgar Pangborn. (Come to think, Edgar's *Davy* world doesn't bear rigorous examination either.) As with Edgar's *West of the Sun*, I wish he hadn't tried quite so hard to be a science fiction writer, but it's still a good read.

The above technique is called praising with *strong* damns.

I took one kind-of chance on my trip. I have grown *very* wary of hype, to the point where my expectations go in inverse proportion to the fervency of the hype. When I got a galley from Ace containing three effusive introductions as part of the text, my first instinct was, beware, it's a trap.

But the *authors* of the three intros were Poul Anderson, Jerry Pournelle and Larry Niven. I decided if I couldn't trust them, I couldn't trust anybody, and packed the book.

People, if Anderson, Pournelle and Niven tell you a book is terrific, believe it.

Silverlock is a fantasy involving a gentleman of that name who is shipwrecked in a strange land called The Commonwealth. It is the Commonwealth of Letters, and its inhabitants include Robin Hood, Don Quixote, Paul Bunyan, Pangloss, Circe, even old Orpheus himself (among *many* others), all in the thinnest of disguises or none at all. What author John Myers Myers (his parents presumably stuttered) essentially did was throw *Everyman* and Dante's *Inferno* into a blender with every good fantasy ever written, garnish with wit and irony, and serve. The results are not dramatically balanced, but quite striking. I have a feeling I'd have enjoyed the book even more if I were better-read in fantasy, if I'd been able to recognize more of the inside jokes—but even in my relative ignorance I had

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an enormously good time.

All praise to the above-named three gentlemen for browbeating Jim Baen of Ace into rereleasing this forgotten masterpiece, and all praise to Jim for listening.

The Star-Spangled Future might well be subtitled "The Best of Norman Spinrad." It contains ten stories from previous Spinrad collections (six from *No Direction Home*, four from *The Last Hurrah of the Golden Horde*) plus four new stories and introductory matter. They all concern the future of America, and they are some of the best SF written in the last fifteen years. (Two of them were Nebula nominees.) Norman is like Harlan Ellison in that his talent is so large that he does not always have it in control, and can get away with it.

Retief Unbound is definitely the weakest of Keith Laumer's Retief novels, but that doesn't make it bad. And in the closing pages you will find one of the most gorgeously abominable puns ever perpetrated—I won't spoil it for you, you'll know it when you get to it. Good (well, fair) light entertainment from Old (well, middle-aged) Reliable.

The End of Summer, edited by Barry Malzberg and Bill Pronzini, is an excellent selection of 50s SF, the first I've ever seen that does not overrate the importance of *Galaxy* and *F&SF* (six of the ten stories are from Campbell's Astounding). The commentary by M&P is as superb as the stories, which is saying a lot. Check the table of contents, and if they're not all familiar, score the book.

The Cave of Time—first in a series of children's books from Bantam, one of the few successful uses of second-person narrative mode. A brilliant premise: the reader helps write the story, by making choices. You discover a mysterious cave: if you want to investigate it, go to page X; if you want to go back for reinforcements, go to page Y. Choices must be made every couple of pages; thus the book is many stories in one. (The alternate universe concept in a nutshell.) It must have been a hell of a complex layout job, even with illos to help, but it was worth the trouble. I'm not sure what the upper age limit would be, but with some judicious impromptu simplification I managed to get my four-year-old hooked.

Some Will Not Die is an Algis Budrys reprint. It was originally published in 1954 as *False Night*, but the publisher, for reasons of his own, cut a full quarter of the text. (!) In 1961 Regency printed it correctly under its present title, and that's the version you get now from Dell. It's an odd little book—the "hero," insofar as it has one, is history, the process of human adaptation to catastrophe. An after-the-collapse novel, the collapse in this case being a plague that took 90 percent of the race. I think Budrys grossly overestimates the shelf-life of military technology (three generations later people are still fighting with tanks and other complex weaponry), but it didn't interfere with my enjoyment of a somewhat episodic but absorbing future history, with the style and grace typical of Budrys.

The Red Limit is a science fact book, an examination of the history of cosmology aimed at the intelligent lay person. Naturally it rings in a plethora of related disciplines, explaining as necessary and not other-

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wise. I found it fascinating, informative, pellucidly clear and extremely thought-provoking; I've read enormous selections from it aloud to people. Imagine a detective story whose mystery is literally the secret of the universe. Author Timothy Ferris is the same Ferris who used to run *Rolling Stone*'s New York bureau; his articles on science have appeared there and in *Harper's, Esquire, Playboy* and *New Times.* Of all the books I enjoyed on my trip, this was the most important to me as an SF writer. And punlovers will find one or two beauties (see the bottom of p. 79)—astronomers seem to have interesting minds.

As long as we're talking about science fact books, why not talk about John Sparks' **The Sexual Connection?** Well, for one thing because you Americans may not be able to buy it—my copy of the Sphere edition lists six prices, but none of them are in greenbacks. But it's worth writing away for: an astonishing and detailed examination of the mating habits of all terrestrial life forms. Sparks' tongue is firmly in (his own) cheek, and I can't think of a double or triple entendre he's left out (except the one in the Retief novel cited above). More important, some of the stuff he's dug up is astounding. Did you know about the species of octopus that mates by stuffing an exploding cigar up his ladyfriend's nose? (I swear to God.) I was told in school (though admittedly not by an instructor) that man had the largest male organ in ratio to body size—but it seems the world's champ is actually the barnacle. It has *two*, each thirty times its body length. As with the previous book, writers will find a book's worth of material here—in fact, I think Phil Farmer and Ted Sturgeon already have. Look for it on your next trip to Canada, or send the equivalent of eighty-five pence plus postage to Sphere Books, Ltd., 30/32 Gray's Inn Rd., London WC1X 8JL.

One last indulgence.

As I write this, I've seen over a dozen reviews of **Alien**, in and out of the genre. I have yet to see a bad review. Dozens of people *begged* me to see it; apparently everybody loves it.

So even though it will probably already have left your neighborhood by the time this sees print, I just have to go on record as saying that I think it stinks on ice.

I was *told* it was "only a haunted house movie in space." Even its most enthusiastic acolytes admitted this. "But *jeeze,* Spider," they said, "it's the best damn haunted house movie you ever saw."

Goat berries.

Look, if you want to scare me, you must suspend my disbelief. You cannot do this by *opening* with a spacecraft that resembles the Cathedral of Notre Dame, telling me that it is towing (for Christ's sake) twenty million tons of *ore* from one *star* to another, and then populating it with "crew" who spend the journey in cold sleep. And having their landing craft disabled by a rock under the landing jack. While they are responding to a warning beacon that a long-dead alien left broadcasting across light-years so that no one would come to investigate it.

But come, let us leave aside the gaping holes in plot-logic (believe me, we haven't caressed, much less scratched, the surface); let us accept this stupendous disco palace starship which has no air-conditioning to spoil the in-

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door fog and no overhead lights in any compartment; let us ignore the bullshit robot drooling cream of chicken soup and the surrealistic "spacesuits" and the lifeboat that features a selection of poison gases and the *stupid* goddam blinking lights on the "computer" and the absurdly bad design of the alien ship; let us even grant that people stupid enough to hunt an unknown homicidal ET with Bunsen burners in airshafts by flashlight would be selected for crew on a starship the size of Perth Amboy, New Jersey. Let us forget that we know anything about SF and consider this strictly as a haunted house movie.

In a haunted house movie, I will accept, once, a scene in which the tension builds and EEEK! everybody jumps ten feet in the air and it turns out to be only Jones the cat. I will accept it as wry homage to one of the great cheap clichés of the genre, and let it pass. Once. Do it *twice* and you're a chump, an artistically bankrupt chump. (By the way, would *you* share a closed air system with a kitty-litter box?) Every other cheap cliché of bad horror movies is in *Alien* (most of them distorted by the forced translation into the science fiction metaphor), not omitting the single most basic flaw of all the truly rotten ones: the idiot plot.

Damon Knight coined this term for the plot which cannot possibly work unless every single character is, at all times, an idiot. How can you empathize with a character of whom you are deeply contemptuous? Even one in scanty panties? (Entirely gratuitous ones.) When Sigournay Weaver, as acting commanding officer, let her subordinate get away with countermanding a direct order in time of crisis, I decided that I could spare her. There wasn't anybody on the ship I couldn't spare, including the alien.

Everyone praises the "marvelous characterizations." Let's see: we have the jock captain, the pretty girl, the unpretty girl who does nothing but whimper, the surly strong man, the evilscientist (one word in Hollywood) and the comic relief. New ground has not been startled, let alone broken here. Hey, wasn't there a copilot too? That's how memorable the characters were. I retain exactly two names. Dallas, the pilot, because the name is so utterly preposterous, and Sigourney Weaver's character.

Because when she *said* her name right at the end, "Ripley," my wife Jeanne, sitting next to me in the theater, muttered *sotto voce:* "Believe it or not."

Damn it, they are pouring dollars like urine over science fiction, and dissolving it into sludge on the wide screen. At least when this kind of junk played in drive-ins in the 50s, we had more sense than to put our attention on the screen. The multimillion-dollar version is so gaudy, garish and strobe-lit I am forced to propound Robinson's Eighth Law: The only thing worse than cheap junk is expensive junk. (Or as William Goldman said, "You can't wash garbage.")

This is the third time they've built my hopes up, and I *still* feel the same way about science fiction cinema that Mahatma Ghandhi felt when they asked him what he thought about Western civilization.

"That would be very nice," he said.

So how was *your* summer vacation? ■

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Dear Mr. Schmidt:

Regarding "American Enthusiasm for Space Flight" in the July issue, it is unfortunate that in weighing the political aspects of the issue Mr. Bainbridge chose to consider the antiquated Left/Right position as opposed to the modern Libertarian/Authoritarian mode. Had he done so he would have seen his own survey was colored by a bias toward the idea that Group A has the right to force Group B to pay for something Group A thinks is "GOOD" regardless of how Group B may feel about the issue: i.e., an authoritarian approach.

I, like many Libertarians, am very much in favor of the exploration of space. However, we believe it should be undertaken by voluntary organizations and not by extorting funds from those who, while they may demonstrably benefit, have no interest in participating. If the venture seems sufficiently profitable to the voluntary organization it will be undertaken at its risk and to its reward or loss. The fact that others may profit is incidental. The fact that others are not coerced into something they oppose, however, is not incidental.

ROBERT B. PEIRCE
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Dear Stan:

In the June Analog, we are presented with a lovely example of that "sense of rupture" Delany was talking about in May. I am reading R.C.W. Ettinger's little puff-piece, disagreeing with it now and then for my own odd reasons, and, for sure, thinking of Ettinger as the experienced SF reader and writer he certainly must be. And then we get it, right between the poor old eyes:

"But his (Poul Anderson's) books are mostly just space operas, with a little psycho-social gimmick here and there"; and, after noting that most SF stories will not be, persuasively, about superhumans (i.e. superhuman intellects: the identity is not, to me, all that simple):"...(therefore) we cannot expect much from future stories, except light entertainment."

Well, my musical friend, I wish Ettinger's comments had given me some light entertainment. Instead, they gave me (and, I should think, you, Delany, and anybody of sense) a rupture, in Delany's sense of the word. Ruptures are seldom entertaining.

Now look: Ettinger does grant that Anderson is "one of the better science fiction writers." It is an admirable thing to see, this admission; it lets us know that Ettinger rather likes Poul Anderson's stories, about the way I rather like your average TV sitcom. Should any writer, whose work over thirty-five years has created the worlds, the wonders, the craft and art

BRASS TACKS

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that Anderson's work has consistently created, sit still for this sort of head-pat? I hereby solemnly vow that if Ettinger ever calls *me* (to take, as an example, a *corpus vile)* one of the better SF writers I will lie in wait for the man and fracture his frozen damned head for him. This is the sort of nice-little-kiddies judgment we expect and have learned to endure from a great pile of academics; I will not endure it (and God knows I didn't expect it) from Ettinger, who knows better.

However: to begin with, Anderson's *first* novel dealt with superhuman intelligence; it was called *Brain Wave* and is now in print, in reissue. It is shockingly convincing. A good deal of his other work has dealt either with true top-level intelligence among humans (shall we say van Rijn?) or with that other, and—believe me!—equally difficult challenge John Campbell tossed at everybody like a grenade back about 1950: "Find me something that thinks *as well as* a human being, but not *like* a human being" (shall we say the Ythri?). If Mr. Ettinger thinks this is either easier or less thoroughly involving to read, than human superintelligence stories, I invite him to try doing it—or, having opened (let us say) *The Earth Book of Stormgate* or *The People of the Wind,* put it down without noticeable effort halfway through. Mr. Ettinger: where have you been, and what in God's name have you been reading? The work of Poul Anderson is as distinguished, as full of promise for the future (for the most part, like all of us, he enjoys looking at a good many different sides of so entire a question), as that of any writer I know in or out of SF. It is a glowing example of the sort of thing Mr. Ettinger is crying out in the wilderness for, superintelligent people and all. And it is just as much Mr. Ettinger's "light entertainment," to which I can hear "mere" being attached just out of sight, about half an inch into the tunnels of Mr. Ettinger's not-entirely-frozen head, as any of the works he cites with such oddly hesitant praise just a bit later on—as much "light entertainment," in that head-patting pejorative sense of his, as (shall we say) the best work of Budrys or Blish or Spinrad or Zelazny or (for that matter) Delany. I am not trying to say that these people do not entertain; they do, and any piece of prose that wants attention without being able to command it (as a textbook commands, or a written set of instructions) had damned well better. If I ain't having fun, in some sense, why am I reading this stuff? It being conceded, I hope, that I don't have to: why am I reading *Lear* or *Michaelmas* or *Black Easter* or *Stormgate?*

But these jobs do more than entertain. They make worlds. They allow a reader to live more lives than his own, which (it has always seemed to me) is the only major purpose of fiction: to extend experience.

I've written "light entertainment," in what I think must be Mr. Ettinger's sense, because I've written funny stories now and then, and funny stuff

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always tends to get put down by flipness like that, even if Thurber or Benchley or Shakespeare writes it (the effort with Shakespeare's comedies is always to find out why they are not *just* comedies: they have to be something else, and something unfunny like a world-encompassing symbolic structure, before they can be truly admitted into the canon). And I've written stories and books I will make other, and wider, claims for. I do know the difference. Poul Anderson has written "light entertainment" in Ettinger's sense, because he has written a startlingly wide range of stuff when you stop and look, from *The High Crusade* to *The Enemy Stars* and back again by ten or twelve different roads. And he has written (and mostly) stories and novels for which I would claim other, and wider descriptions.

Mr. Ettinger ought to know that. He ought surely to know that *Brain Wave* exists, and that Anderson's vision of the future is full of hope and change and growth. Why doesn't he? Rupture! as Delany cries, and he's right. This sort of thing, from a writer who has been around a while now, is just a little like Delany's wonderful editor who didn't know what the Hugos were. No: more than a litt
The hell of a damn big lot.

There is no need for me to rush to the defense of Poul Anderson. I scarcely know the man even by correspondence, and we met once, for about fifteen seconds, maybe fifteen years ago. And he needs no defense, surely not in the eyes of Analog readers, who have a great deal of Anderson to remember.

On the other hand, maybe there are more Analog readers like this Mr. Ettinger. Surely they ought to be straightened out? And here I am, with a typewriter. . .

And then there are the people who pick up Analog for the very first time with the June 1979 issue—possibly led to do so by the appearance of R.C.W. Ettinger on the cover, since the Ettinger name does promise a discussion of cryonics. . .

Some of these people are going to go out to a bookstore and look for some SF. And they are either going to pass up Anderson because he's just "light entertainment," and go for one of the jobs on the Ettinger More-or-Less Approved List (in which case they'll miss out on a great deal of wondrous work), or pick up a job like *The Earth Book of Stormgate* under the impression that it *is* just "light entertainment" (in which case they are in for one hell of a nasty shock as the stuff starts to get under the skin and go to work). Either alternative is undesirable. Perhaps this will go a little way toward correcting this fantastic blunder, and providing such readers with an honest alternative or two. Or six, I suppose.

What I am, Stan, I am damned mad. This is work I respect, and it is being kicked to hell and gone by an author who has all the credentials you can wave for knowing better.

It is difficult to avoid labeling a man who makes patently idiotic statements as anything other than an idiot. It is surely unfair to Mr. Ettinger to label him an idiot, and I am trying my very hardest not to do that. But my God! Stan, he is not making it any easier for me out here.

Mr. Ettinger is not an idiot. I think

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there are a good many holes in his case for cryonics, and I know beyond doubt that there are some (e.g. statistics); but, just at the moment, that scarcely matters. As he is not an idiot, it is possible for me to tell him to for God's sake quit sounding like one. Hereby told.

LAURENCE M. JANIFER
New York City, N.Y

Dear Mr. Schmidt:

It is not the computing power or the physical strength that determine the survival of the fittest; it is the number of dimensions that we are aware of and can use. The best measure of evolutionary success is the number of dimensions the species can employ to insure its survival.

Viruses have no sense of dimension; in effect they are dimensionless beings. They are either "here" in a food-containing spot feeding and multiplying, or "away" and dormant. Their only weapon to insure survival is rapid reproduction.

Bacteria with chemical senses effectively live in one dimension: their awareness tells them whether they are nearing a source of pleasant emanations or not, and they can adjust their locomotion accordingly. Thus they can make use of nearby food sources that viruses would have to ignore.

Larger creatures with paired receptors can sense two dimensions in space. They can conserve energy: they can tell whether food or predator is approaching directly or obliquely, and consequently can determine whether movement is necessary or not.

Focused vision and echo-location made creatures aware of a third spatial dimension, which gave them even more control over their fate: they could take to the air or trees to survive. This evidently was a successful development: the number of aerial and arboreal species exceeds that of ground dwellers.

Man became different from animals when he became aware of the existence of time, a dimension for which we had no sensors, but somehow we did acquire an awareness of it. This awareness of time enabled man to plan ahead; it told him that it is better to sow seed in the ground rather than eat it: a bountiful harvest lasts much longer than the measly amount of seed expended. This unique awareness enabled man to become the master of all creation, for he could take knowledge and materials from the past, invest them in the present, and in the future he would recoup his investment with a profit, an action that would appear to be senseless waste of resources to someone without awareness of time.

Evolution will again take a leap ahead when man acquires awareness of still another dimension, a dimension that already exists in this world, but which we cannot yet sense. Perhaps the "psychics" are dimly aware of this dimension; through it they can see events and influence phenomena in ways we term "miraculous". Eventually the man of the future will use this additional dimension the way we use time to better our world.

ANDREJS BAIDINS
1104 Windon Drive
Wilmington, Del. 19803

Dear Stanley,

I just read your editorial, "Servant's Pay," and it strikes me

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that you don't go nearly far enough. To make our elected representatives really responsive, why not have each taxpayer designate how much he himself is willing to pay his representatives? (For each citizen, that includes two Senators and one Representative.) For the sake of maximum effectiveness, the amounts each person can contribute should be limited to no more than one dollar a year. If every member of the district gives a Representative the maximum, that comes to about $485,000 in one year. In California, a widely loved Senator could earn up to $20,000,000 in one year. (This may be too high. A quite effective range would be to limit each voter to either giving a quarter or nothing. If a man is doing a poor job, he may have to file for bankruptcy.)

We would control the pursestrings. I can't think of anything healthier for a democracy. And Congress doesn't have to pass it, either. A Constitutional Convention would do it, and that could be called easily, as long as we keep our hands off the states. We could handle them later.

Of course, Constitutional Conventions carry an element of risk, since no one really knows how one is supposed to be run, or how far afield the Convention can wander. Which is one reason I feel we need national referendums. It would be a measure between normal government procedure and Convention, something we could use.

But—as long as we've built our dream castle, why not move in? Why not allow each taxpayer to dictate exactly how he wants his tax money spent each year? No limits. If someone wants to give every dime of his taxes to Defense, or Foreign Aid, or R&D—why not?

It has its good and bad points, of course. On the good side, the government would be unable to keep us in the dark about things, since secret projects would not be funded. It would all but kill pork-barreling. Lobbying would die on the vine, since the Congress would no longer have control over finances. (I always felt the job of the legislature was to give law anyway, not appropriate funds.) It would relieve the tremendous burden on our Congress as well. With all the financial decisions going on, Congress can no longer run things properly. By taking the taxing (ugh!) matter of finances out of their hands, we would allow them to concentrate on their other duties.

On the bad side, needed programs might not get funds. This is the major objection I've heard every time I've mentioned this idea. I can't agree with it. Judging by the way the American people have acted in the past, I think that if they are made aware of problems, they will be more than willing to give money to solve the problems. It just makes secrecy a thing of the past. Note: I don't mean military secrecy. That would persist, since giving away intelligence is the large-scale equivalent of slashing one's wrists. I mean day-to-day secrecy of the kind that is not really needed for the functioning of the country. If the Congress really thought something was needed, they could simply bring out all the facts and let the people decide. If it is needed, enough people will give money. If not, then we really didn't need it anyway.

Example: Welfare. It's a needed program, but in its present form it is a

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monster. I doubt if anyone would give it money. Certainly it wouldn't get enough to keep going. So what happens? The Congress puts together a new welfare system that *works*. If they did, I myself would vote it money. I would not vote money to the current system.

Example: Space. Most people don't believe in Space, so they would cut it off. However, those of us who do could give 50-100% of our taxes to it. And there would be an incentive for NASA to talk to the people. I believe that if NASA hired a competent publicity man, they would see a show of support from the people reminiscent of the early Sixties, and they might possibly see their budgets increasing as people decided to vote them money, even a dollar each. (Puts me in mind of the old "Laugh-in" bit, where Dan said, "Do you realize there are fifty or sixty million people watching us right now?" and Dick said to the camera, "If each and every one of you could send in *one* dollar . . .")

The idea needs hammering out, of course, but it seems to have potential. I only wish someone had considered it two hundred years ago.

DEREK GRIMMELL
3300 Polk St. N.E.
Minneapolis, MN 55418

The Editor, Analog:

The authors of "Ghostwritten Man" offered a poetic solution to the troubles of Ulster, namely, the Kilkenny Cat sort, where the radicals of both factions wipe each other out.

They forgot the single event of the 19th Century which had the most bearing on the Irish question, though. What about the Great Potato Lack? The Potato Blight of the mid 1840s? That caused famine to a degree that no other European nation had, due to an almost total single crop economy for the poor. Compounded by a British attitude that there was no problem, and later stupid attempts to Do Something, this led to wholesale death, emigration to the US, Canada, and elsewhere, and a generation of hatred among some of the survivors.

Odd historical note. US relief supplies included a lot of corn meal. Mush being well known to us, no one included directions on what to do with the corn meal....Starving Irish wondered what the hell it was. One hundred years later we sent corn meal to Japan after the war, and with it, we included recipes, only we listed puddings and so forth calling for eggs and sugar. What eggs? What sugar? The more things change....

I doubt there will ever be a solution of the Irish Question, as it is a convenient excuse for a fight, though some of the current hostiles use indiscriminate weapons. The IRA has had odd friends in the past, such as the Nazis in 1939-45 and the various Communist lands today. The enemy of my enemy is my friend, they thinks. I doubt they'd enjoy living in a world run by the "bloody-minded professors" of the Red bloc.

JOHN P. CONLON
Descendant of Some of
the Emigrants of the
Famine Years.
52 Columbia St.
Newark, OH 43055

Relief programs are interesting things. A basic principle often overlooked—I've seen other examples myself—is "Know Thy Beneficiary."

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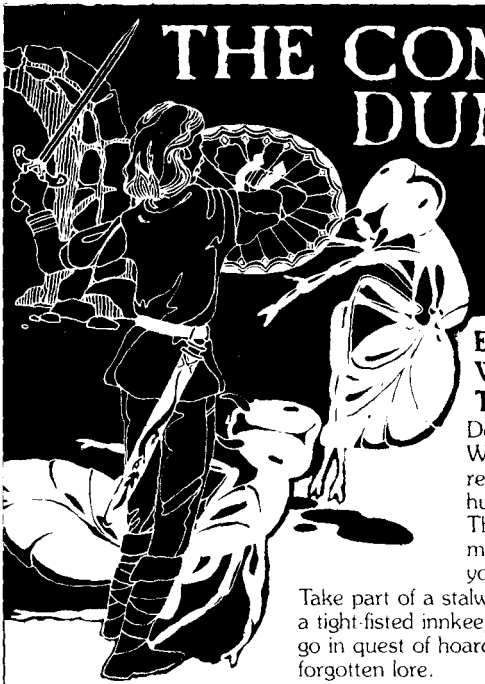

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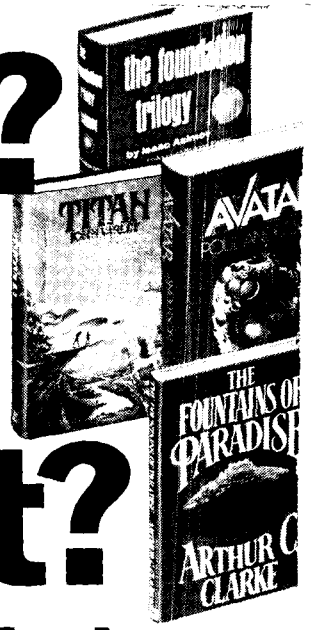

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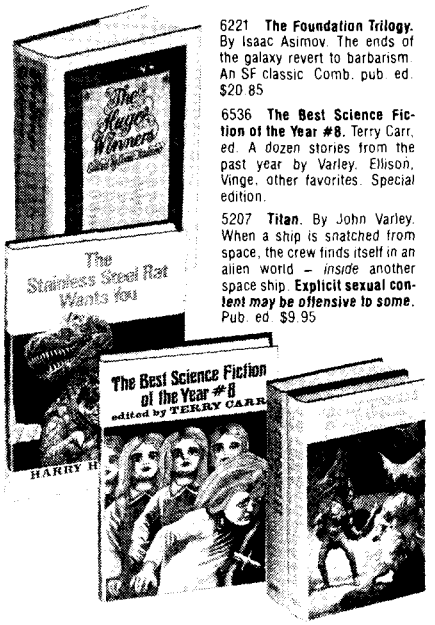

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